SET IN SILVER

C N & A M
Williamson

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Audrie

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BY

C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

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C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
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Published, April, 1909

TO A GREAT MAN, AND A GREAT MOTORIST

With all admiration we dedicate our story of a tour in the land he loves.

". . . this little world,
This precious stone, set in the silver sea
That serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm,
this England."

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SET IN SILVER

I

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER AT CHAMPEL-LES-BAINS, SWITZERLAND

Rue Chapeau de Marie Antoinette
Versailles, July 4th

Darling Little French Mother: Things have happened. Fire-crackers! Roman candles! rockets! But don't be frightened. They 're all in my head. Nevertheless I have n't had such a Fourth of July since I was a small girl in America, and stood on a tin pail with a whole pack of fire-crackers popping away underneath.

Is n't it funny, when you have a lot to tell, it 's not half as easy to write a letter as when you 've nothing at all to say, and must make up for lack of matter by weaving phrases? Now, when I 'm suffering from a determination of too many words to my pen, they all run together in a torrent, and I don't know how to make them dribble singly to a beginning.

I think I 'll talk about other things first. That 's the way dear Dad used to do when he had exciting news, and loved to dangle it over our heads, "cherry ripe" fashion, harping on the weather or the state of the stock-market until he had us almost dancing with impatience.

Yes, I 'll dwell on other things first — but not irrelevant things, for I 'll dwell on You — with a capital Y, which

is the only proper way to spell You — and You are never irrelevant. You could n't be, whatever was happening. And just now you 're particularly relevant, though you 're far off in nice, cool Switzerland; for presently, when I come to the Thing, I 'm going to ask your advice.

It 's very convenient having a French mother, and I do appreciate dear Dad's Yankee cleverness in securing you in the family. You say sometimes that I seem all American, and that you 're glad; which is pretty of you, and loyal to father's country, but I 'm not sure whether I should n't have preferred to turn out more like my mamma. You 're so *complete*, somehow — as Frenchwomen are, at their best. I often think of you as a kind of pocket combination of Somebody's Hundred Best Books: Romance, Practical Common Sense, Poetry, Wit, Wisdom, Fancy Cookery, etc., etc.

Who but a Frenchwoman could combine all these qualities with the latest thing in hair-dressing and the neatest thing in stays? By the way, can one's stays be a quality? Yes, if one 's French — even half French — I believe they can.

If I had n't just got your letter of day before yesterday, assuring me that you feel strong and fresh — almost as if you 'd never been ill — I should n't worry you for advice. Only a few weeks ago, if suddenly called upon for it, you 'd have shown signs of nervous prostration. I shall never forget my horror when you (quite uncontrollably) threw a spoon at Philomene who came to ask whether we would have soup *à croute* or *potage à la bonne femme* for dinner!

Switzerland was an inspiration; mine, I flatter myself.

And if, in telling me that you 're in robust health again, you 're hinting at an intention to sneak back to blazing Paris before the middle of September, you don't know your Spartan daughter. All that 's American in me rises to shout "No!" And you need n't think that your child is bored. She may be boiled, but never bored. Far from it, as you shall hear.

School breaks up to-morrow — breaks into little blond and brunette bits, which will blow or drift off to their respective homes; and I should by this time be packing to visit the Despards, where I 'm supposed to teach Mimi's young voice to soar, as compensation for holiday hospitality; but — I'm not packing, because Ellaline Lethbridge has had an attack of nerves.

You won't be surprised that I stopped two hours overtime to-day to hold the hand and to stroke the hair of Ellaline. I 've done that before, when she had a pain in her finger, or a cold in her little nose, and sent you a *petit bleu* to announce that I could n't get home for dinner and our happy hour together. No, you won't be surprised at my stopping — or that Ellaline should have an attack of nerves. But the reason for the attack and the cure she wants me to give her: these *will* surprise you.

Why, it 's almost as hard to begin, after all, as if I had n't been working industriously up to it for three pages. But here goes!

Dearest, you 've often said, and I 've agreed with you (or else it was the other way round), that *nothing* I could ever do for Ellaline Lethbridge would be too much; that she could n't ask any sacrifice of me which would be too

great. Of course, one does say these things until one is tested. But — I wonder if there is a "but"?

Of course you believe that your one chick has a glorious voice, and that it 's a cruel shame she should be doing nothing better than teaching other people's chicks to squall, whether their voices are worth squalling with or not. Perhaps, though, mine may n't be as remarkable an organ as we think; and even if you had n't made me give up trying for light opera, because I received one Insult (with a capital I) while I was Madame Larese's favourite pupil, I might n't in any case have turned into a great prima donna. I was rather excited and amused by the Insult myself — it made me feel so interesting, and so like a heroine of romance; but you did n't approve of it; and we had some hard times, had n't we, after all our money was spent in globe-trotting, and lessons for me from the immortal Larese?

If it had n't been for meeting Ellaline, and Ellaline falling a victim to my modest charms, and insisting upon Madame de Maluet's taking me as a teacher of singing for her "celebrated finishing school for Young Ladies," what would have become of us, dearest, with you so delicate, me so young, and both of us so poor and alone in a big world? I really don't know, and you 've often said you did n't.

Of course, if it had n't been for Ellaline — Madame's richest and most important girl — persisting as she did, in her imperious, spoiled-child way, Madame would n't have dreamed of engaging a young girl like me, without any experience as a teacher, no matter how much she liked my voice and my (or rather Larese's) method. I suppose

no one would else have risked me; so I certainly do owe to Ellaline, and nobody but Ellaline, three happy and (fairly) prosperous years. To be sure, because of my position at Madame de Maluet's, I have got a few outside pupils; but that 's indirectly through Ellaline, too, is n't it?

I 'm reminding you of all these things so that you may have it clearly before your mind just how much we do owe Ellaline, and judge whether the payment she now asks is too big or not. .

That 's the way she puts it, not coarsely or crudely; but I know how she feels.

She sent me a little note yesterday, while I was giving a lesson, to say she 'd a horrid headache, had gone to bed, and would I come to her room as soon as I could. Well, I went at lunch time, for I hated to keep her waiting, and thought I could eat later. As it turned out, I did n't eat at all. But that 's a detail.

She had on a perfectly divine nighty, with low neck and short sleeves (no girl would be *allowed* to wear such a thing in any but a French school, I 'm sure, even if she were a "parlour boarder") and her hair was in curly waves over her shoulders. Altogether she looked adorable, and about fourteen years old, instead of nearly nineteen, as she is.

"You don't show your headache a bit," said I.

"I have n't got one," said she.

Then she explained that she 'd been dying for a chance to talk with me alone, and the headache was the only thing that occurred to her in the circumstances. She does n't mind little fibs, you know. Indeed, I believe she rather likes them, because any "intrigue," even the smallest, is exciting to her.

You would never guess anything like what has happened.

That dragon of a guardian of hers is coming back at last from Bengal, where he 's been governor or something. Not that his coming would matter particularly if it were n't for complications, but there are several, the most formidable of which is a Young Man.

The Young Man is a French young man, and his name is Honoré du Guesclin. He is a lieutenant in the army (Ellaline mentioned the regiment with pride, but I 've forgotten it already, there was so much else to remember), and she says he is descended from the great Du Guesclin. She met him at Madame de Blanchemain's — you remember the Madame de Blanchemain who was Ellaline's dead mother's most intimate friend, and who lives at St. Cloud? Ellaline has spent all her holidays there ever since I 've known her; but though I thought she told me everything (she always vowed she did), not a word did she ever breathe about a young man having risen over her horizon. She says she did n't dare, because I 'm so "queer and prim about some things." I 'm not, am I? But now she 's driven to confess, as she 's in the most awful scrape, and does n't know what will become of her and "darling Honoré," unless I 'll consent to help them.

She met him only last Easter. He 's a nephew of Madame de Blanchemain's, it seems; and on coming back from foreign service in Algeria, or somewhere, he dutifully paused to visit his relative. Of course it occurs to me, Did Madame de Blanchemain write and intimate that she would have in the house a pretty little Anglo-French heiress, with no inconvenient relatives, unless one counts the Dragon? But Ellaline says Honoré's coming was

quite a surprise to his aunt. Anyway, he proposed on the third day, and Ellaline accepted him. It was by moonlight, in a garden, so who can blame the poor child? I always thought if even a moderately good-looking young man proposed to me by moonlight, in a garden, I would say "Yes —yes!" at once, even if I changed my mind next day.

But Honoré is *very* good looking (she has his picture in a locket, with *such* a turned-up moustache — I mean Honoré, not the locket), and so Ellaline did n't change her mind next day.

Not a word was said to Madame de Blanchemain (as far as Ellaline knows), for they decided that, considering everything, they must keep their secret, and eventually run away to be married; because Honoré is poor, and Ellaline 's an heiress guarded by a Dragon.

Well, through letters which E. has been receiving at a teashop where she and the other older girls go, rigorously chaperoned, twice a week, it was arranged to do the deed as soon as school should close; and if they could have carried out their plan, Ellaline would have been Madame du Guesclin before the Dragon could have appeared on the scene, breathing fire and rattling his scales. They were going to Scotland to be married (Honoré's idea), as a man can't legally marry a girl under age in France without the consent of everybody concerned. Once she 'd got away with him, and had had any kind of hole-in-the-corner wedding, Honoré was of opinion that even the most abandoned Dragon would be thankful to sanction a marriage according to French law; so it could all be done over again properly in France.

I suppose this appealed immensely to Ellaline's love of

intrigue and kittenish tricksiness generally. Anyway, she agreed; but young officers propose, and their superiors dispose. Honoré was ordered off for a month's manœuvres before he could even ask for leave; and as he 's known to be destitute of near relatives, he could n't rake up a perishing grandmother as an excuse.

What he did try, I don't know; but anyhow, he failed, and the running away had to be put off. That was blow number one, and could have been borne, without blow number two, which fell in the shape of a letter. It said that the wicked guardian was just about to start for home, and intended to pick up Ellaline on his way to England, as if she were a parcel labelled "to be kept till called for."

She 's certain he won't let her marry Honoré if he has the chance to say "no" beforehand, because he cares nothing about her happiness, or about her, or anything else except his own selfish ambitions. Of course, Ellaline is a girl who takes strong prejudices against people for no particular reason, except that she has a "feeling they are horrid"; but she does appear to be right about this man. He 's English, and though Ellaline's mother was half French, they were cousins, and I believe her dying request was that he should take care of her daughter and her daughter's money. You would have thought that that must have softened even a hard heart, would n't you? But the Dragon's was evidently sentiment-proof, even so many years ago, when he must have been comparatively young — if Dragons are ever young.

He accepted the charge (Ellaline thinks her money probably influenced him to do that; and perhaps he was paid for his trouble); but, instead of carrying out his

engagements, like a faithful guardian, he packed the poor four-year-old baby off to some pokey, prim people in the country, and promptly went abroad to enjoy himself. There Ellaline would no doubt have been left to this day, dreadfully unhappy and out of her element, for the people were an English curate and his wife; but, luckily, her mother had stipulated that she was to be sent to the same school in France where she herself had been educated — Madame de Maluet's.

Never once has her guardian shown the slightest sign of interest in Ellaline: has n't asked for her photograph or written her any letters. They 've communicated with each other only through Madame de Maluet, four times a year or so; and Ellaline does n't feel sure that her fortune has been properly administered, so she says she ought to marry young and have a husband to look after her interests.

When I ventured to hope that the Dragon was n't quite so scaly and taily as she painted him, she proved her point by telling me that he 'd been censured lately in the English Radical papers for killing a lot of poor, defenceless Bengalese in cold blood. Somebody must have sent her the cuttings, for Ellaline hardly knows that newspapers exist. I dare say it was Kathy Bennett, one of Madame's few English pupils. Ellaline has chummed up with her lately. And that news does seem to settle the man's character, does n't it? He must be a perfect brute.

Ellaline says that she 'd rather die than lose Honoré, also that he 'll kill himself if he loses her. And now, dearest — now for the Thunderbolt! She vows that the

only thing which can possibly save her is for *me to take her place for five or six weeks*, until her soldier's manœuvres are over and he can get leave to whisk her off to Scotland for the wedding.

You 're the quickest-witted darling in the world, and you generally know all that people mean even before they speak. Yet I can see you looking puzzled as well as startled, and muttering to yourself: "Take Ellaline's place? Where — how — when?"

I was like that myself while she was trying to explain. I stared with an owlish stare for about five minutes, until her real idea in all its native wildness, not to say enormity, burst upon me.

She wants to go day after to-morrow to Madame de Blanchemain's, as she 'd expected to do before she heard that the Dragon was coming to gobble her up. She wants to stay there quietly until Honoré can take her, and she wants *me to pretend to be Ellaline Lethbridge!*

I nearly fell off my chair at this point, but I hope you won't do anything like that — which is the reason why I 've been working up to the revelation with such fiendish subtlety. Have you noticed it?

Ellaline has plotted the whole scheme out. I should n't have thought her capable of it; but she says it 's desperation.

She 's certain she can persuade Madame de Maluet to let her leave school, to go to the station and meet the Dragon (that 's the course he himself suggests: too much trouble even to run out to Versailles and fetch her) with only me as chaperon. I dare say she 's right about Madame, for all the teachers will be gone day after to-

morrow, and Madame herself invariably collapses the moment school breaks up: she seems to break up with it, and to have to lie in bed for at least half a week to be mended.

Madame has really quite a flattering opinion of my discretion. She 's told me so several times. I suppose it 's the way I do my hair for school, which does give me a look of incorruptible virtue, does n't it? Fortunately she does n't know I always change it (if not too tired) ten minutes after I get home to you.

Well, then, taking Madame's permission for granted, Ellaline points out that all stumbling-blocks are removed, for she won't count moral ones, or let me count them.

I 'm to see her off for St. Cloud, and wait to receive the Dragon. "Sir, behold the burnt-offering — I mean, behold your ward!"

And I 'm to go on being a burnt-offering till it 's convenient for the real Ellaline to scrape my ashes off the smoking altar.

It 's all very well to make fun of the thing like that. But to be serious — and goodness knows it 's serious enough — what 's to be done, little mother? Ellaline has (because I insisted) given me till to-morrow morning to answer. I explained that my consent must depend on your consent. So that 's why I have n't had anything to eat since breakfast. I rushed home to write this immense letter to you, and get it off to catch the post. It will arrive in the morning with your coffee and *petits pains* — how I wish I were in its place! You can take half an hour to make up your mind (I 'm sure with your lightning wits you would n't ask longer to decide the fate of the

Great Powers of Europe) and then telegraph me simply "Yes," or "No." I will understand.

For my own sake, naturally, I should prefer "No." That goes unsaid, does n't it? I should then be relieved of responsibility; for even Ellaline, knowing that you and I are all in all to each other, could hardly expect me to fly in your face, just to please her. But, on the other hand, if you did think I could do this dreadful thing without thereby becoming myself a Dreadful Thing, it would be a glorious relief to pay my debt of gratitude to Ellaline, yes, and even *over*-pay it, perhaps. One likes to over-pay a debt that 's been owing a long time, for it 's like adding an accumulation of interest that one's creditor never expected to get.

When, gasping after the first shock, I pleaded that I 'd do anything else, make any other sacrifice for Ellaline's sake, except this *one*, she flashed out (with the odd shrewdness which lurks in her childishness like a bright little garter-snake darting its head from a bed of violets), saying that was always the way with people. They were invariably ready to do for their best friends, to whom they were grateful, anything on earth except the only thing wanted.

Well, I had no answer to make; for it 's true, is n't it? And then Ellaline sobbed dreadfully, clutching at me with little, hot, trembling hands, crying that she 'd *counted* on me, that she 'd been sure, after all my promises, I would n't fail her. She 'd felt so *safe* with me! Are you surprised I had n't the heart to refuse? I confess, dear, that if I were quite alone in the world (though the world would n't be a world without you) I should certainly have grovelled and consented then and there.

She says she won't close her eyes to-night, and I dare say she won't, in which case she 'll be as pathetic as a broken flower to-morrow. I don't think I shall sleep much either, wondering what your verdict will be.

I really have n't the remotest idea whether it will be Yes or No. Usually I imagine that I can pretty well guess what your opinion is likely to be, but I can't this time. The thing to decide upon is in itself so fantastic, so monstrous, that one moment I tell myself you won't even consider it. The next minute I remember what a dear little "crank" you are on the subject of gratitude — your "favourite virtue," as you used to write in old-fashioned "Confession Albums" of provincial American friends when I was a child.

If people do anything nice for you, you run your little high-heeled shoes into holes to do something even nicer for them. If you 're invited out to tea, you ask your hostess to lunch or dinner, in return: that sort of thing invariably; and you 've brought me up with the same bee in my bonnet. So what *will* your telegram be?

Whatever you say, you may count on a meek "Amen, so be it," from

Your most admiring subject,

AUDRIE.

P. S. — Of course, it is n't as if this man were an ordinary, nice, inoffensive human man, is it? I do think that almost any treatment is too good for such a cold-blooded, supercilious old Dragon. And you need n't reprove me for "calling names." With singular justice Providence has ticketed him as appropriately as his worst

enemy would have dared to do. They have such weird names in Cornwall, don't they? — and it seems he 's a Cornishman. Until lately he was plain Mister, now he 's Sir Lionel Pendragon. Somebody has been weak enough to die and leave him a title, and also an estate (though not in Cornwall) which he 's returning to England in greedy haste to pounce upon. So characteristic, after living away all these years; though Madame de Maluet has tried to make Ellaline believe he 's coming back to settle down because of a letter *she* wrote, reminding him respectfully that after nineteen it 's almost indecent for a girl to be kept at school.

Don't fear, however, if your telegram casts me to the Dragon, that I shall be in danger of getting eaten up. His Dragonship, among other stodgy defects, has that of eminent, well-nigh repulsive, respectability. He is as respectable as a ramrod or a poker, and very elderly, Ellaline says. From the way she talks about him he must be getting on for a hundred, and he is provided with a widowed sister, a Mrs. Norton, whom he has dug up from some place in the country to act as chaperon for his ward. All other women he is supposed to detest, and would, if necessary, beat them off with a stick.

II

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Rue Chapeau de Marie Antoinette
Versailles, July 5th

My Spartan Angel: Now the telegram 's come, I feel as if I 'd known all along what your decision would be.

I 'm glad you were extravagant enough to add "Writing," for to-morrow morning I shall know by exactly what mental processes you decided. Also, I 'm glad (I think I 'm glad) that the word is "Yes."

It 's afternoon now; just twenty-four hours since I sat here in the same place (at your desk in the front window, of course), trying my best to put the situation before you, as a plain, unvarnished tale.

I stuck the bit of blue paper under Ellaline's nose, and she almost had a fit with joy. If she were bigger and more muscular, she 'd have kissed and squeezed the breath of life out of me, which would have been awkward for her, as she 'd then have been thrown back upon her own resources.

Oh, *ma petite poupee de Mere*, only think of it! I go to-morrow — into space. I disappear. I cease to exist *pro tem*. There will be no me, no Audrie, but, instead, two Ellalines. I 've often told her, by the way, that I would make two of her. Evidently I once had a prophetic

soul. I only wish I had it still, so I might see beforehand what will happen to the Me-ness of Ellaline in the next few weeks. Anyhow, whatever comes, I expect to be supported by the consciousness that I 'm paying a debt of gratitude as perhaps such a debt was never paid before.

Of course I shall have a perfectly horrid time. Not only shall I be wincing under the degrading knowledge that I 'm a base pretender, but I shall be wretchedly homesick and bored within an inch of my life. I shall be, in the sort of environment Ellaline describes, like a mouse in a vacuum — a poor, frisky, happy, out-of-doors field-mouse, caught for an experiment. When the experiment is finished I shall crawl away, a decrepit wreck. But, thank heaven, I can crawl to You, and you will nurse me back to life. We 'll talk everything over, for hours on end, and I 'll be able to abuse the Dragon to my heart's content. I know you 'll let me do that, provided I don't use naughty words, or, if any, disguise them daintily in a whisper.

Ellaline and I have discussed plans and possibilities, and if all goes as she expects (I don't see why it should n't), I ought to be freed from the unpleasant rôle of understudy in five or six weeks. The instant my chains are broken by a telegram from the bride saying, "Safely married," or words to that effect, I shall do "all my possible" to fold my tent like an Arab and silently steal — not to say sneak — away from the lair of the Dragon, without his opening a scaly red eye to the dreadful reality, until I 'm beyond his power.

It must be either that or the most awful scene with

him — a Regular Row. He, saying what he thinks of my deception; me, defending myself and the real Ellaline by saying what I think of his general beastliness. If it came to that, I might in my rage wax unladylike; so perhaps, of the two evils, the lesser would be the sneak act — *n'est ce pas?* Well, I shall see when the time comes.

In five or six weeks I had thought, in any case, of allowing you to leave Champel-les-Bains, should you grow too restive lacking my society. I thought of proposing by then, if you were sufficiently braced by Swiss air, milk, and honey and Champel douches, that we should join forces at a cheap but alluring farmhouse somewhere.

That idea may still fit in rather well, may n't it? But if, for any unforeseen reason, I should have to stay sizzling on the sacrificial altar longer than we expect, you must n't come home to hot Paris to economize and mope in the flat. You *must* stop in Switzerland till I can meet you in some nice place in the country. Promise that you won't add to my burdens by being refractory.

I 'll wire you an address as soon as I am blessed — or cursed — with one. And *whatever* you do, don't forget that I 'm merged in Ellaline Lethbridge. If her identity fits me as badly as her dresses would do it will come about down to my knees and won't meet round the waist.

As soon as I have your letter to-morrow morning, dearest, I 'll write again, if only a few lines. Then, when I 've seen the Dragon and have gained a vague idea how and where he means to dispose of his prey, I 'll scribble off some sort of description of the man and the meeting,

even if it 's on board the Channel boat, in the midst of a tossing.

Your

IPHEGENIA.

(Or would Jephtha's daughter be more appropriate? I 'm not quite sure how to spell either.)

III

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Rue Chapeau de Marie Antoinette
July 6th. Early Morning

Dearest Dame Wisdom: You ought to be Adviser-in-Chief to Crowned Heads. You 'd be invaluable; worth any salary. What a shame you are n't widely known: a sort of public possession! But for my sake I 'm glad you are n't, because if you were discovered you 'd never have a spare minute to advise me.

Of course, dear, if you had n't reached your conclusions just as you did about this step you would n't have counselled, or even allowed, me to take it. And I will remember every word you say. I 'll do exactly as you tell me to do. So now, don't worry, any more than you would if I were an experienced and accomplished young parachutist about to make a descent from the top of the Eiffel tower.

It 's eight o'clock, and I 've satisfied my soul with your letter and my body with its morning roll and coffee. When I 've finished scribbling this in pencil to you, I shall pack, and be ready — *for anything.*

By the way, that reminds me. What a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive, etc.

Won't the Dragon think it queer that his rich ward should make no better toilettes than I shall be able to

produce — after living at Versailles, practically in Paris, with a huge amount of spending money — for a schoolgirl?

I thought of that difficulty only last night for the first time, after I was in bed, and was tempted to jump up and review my wardrobe. But it was unnecessary. Not only could I call to mind in the most lively way every dress I have, but, I do believe, every dress I ever did have since my frocks were let down or done over from yours. I suppose that ought to make me feel rather young, ought n't it? To remember every dress I ever owned? But it does n't. I 'll be twenty-one this month, you know — a year older than you were when your ears were gladdened by my first howl. I 'm sure it was unearthly, yet that you said at once to Dad: "The dear child is going to be musical!"

But to return to the wardrobe of the heiress's understudy. It consists of my every-day tailor-made, two white linen coats and skirts, a darned collection (I don't mean that profanely) of summer blouses, and the everlasting, the immortal, black evening dress. Is it three or four years old? I know it was my first black, and I did feel so proud and grown-up when you said I might have it.

You 'll be asking yourself: "Where is the blue alpaca she bought in the Bon Marché sale, which was in the act of being made when I left for *la Suisse?*" Up to now I 've concealed from you the tragical fact that that horrid little Mademoiselle Voisin completely spoiled it. I was so furious I could have killed her if she 'd been on the spot. There is no rage like the dress rage, is there?

My one hope is that the Dragon may take as little interest in Ellaline's clothes as he has taken in Ellaline's self, or that, being used to the costumes of the Bengalese, which, perhaps, are somewhat sketchy, he may be thankful that his ward has any at all.

You see, I can't tell Ellaline about this, because she could n't help thinking it a hint for her to supply the deficiency, and I would n't let her do that, even for her own credit. Anyhow, there 'd be no time to get things, so I must just do the best I can, and carry off the old gray serge and sailor hat with a stately air. Heaven gave me five foot seven and a half on purpose to do it with.

Now I must pack like heat-lightning; and when I 've finished I shall send the brown box and the black Gladstone to the Gare de Lyon, where *he* will arrive from Marseilles. That is rather complicated, as of course we must go to the Gare du Nord for Calais or Boulogne; but he may n't wish to start at once for England, and in my new character, as his ward, I must be prepared to obey his orders. I hope he won't treat me as he seems to have treated the Bengalese! The luggage of Miss Ellaline Lethbridge obviously can't be called for at the flat of Mrs. Brendon and her daughter Audrie, for there would be questions — and no proper answers. Therefore, when I present myself at the Gare de Lyon, I intend to be "self-contained." All my worldly goods will be there, to be disposed of as the Grand Mogul pleases.

When I 've packed I shall hie me to Madame de Maluet's, looking as good and meek as a trained dove, to take charge of Ellaline — and to change into Ellaline.

After that — the Deluge.

Good-bye, darling!

Me, to the Lions!

But I shall have your talisman-letter in my pocket. I can't be eaten, though I do feel rather like

Your

MARTYR CHILD.

IV

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

On Board the Boat, half-Channel over
July 6th. Night

Mother Dear: The dragon-ness does n't show at all on the outside.

I expected to meet a creature of almost heraldic grimness — rampant, disregardant, gules. What I did meet — but I 'm afraid that is n't the right way to begin. Please consider that I have n't begun. I 'll go back to the time when Ellaline and her chaperon (me) started away from school together in a discreet and very hot cab with her trunks.

She was jumpy and on edge with excitement, and got on my nerves so that it was the greatest relief when I 'd seen her off in her train for St. Cloud. Just at this point I find another break in my narrative, made by a silly, not at all interesting, adventure.

I 'd been waving my hand for the twenty-fifth time to Ellaline, in response to the same number of waves from her. When at last she drew in her head, as the train steamed away, I turned round in a hurry lest she should pop it out again, and bumped into a man, or what will be a man in a few years if it lives. I said, "*Pardon, monsieur,*" as gravely as if it were a man already, and it said in French

made in England that 't was entirely its fault. It was such a young youth, and looked so utterly English, that I smiled a motherly smile, and breathed, "Not at all," as I passed on, fondly thinking to pass forever out of its life at the same time. But, dearest, the absurd little thing did n't recognize the smile as motherly. Perhaps it never had a mother. I had hardly observed it as an individual, I assure you, except as one's sub-conscious self takes notes without permission from headquarters. I was vaguely aware that the creature with whom I had collided was quite nice-looking, though bullet-headed, freckled, light-blue-eyed, crop-haired, and possessing the shadow of a coming event in the shape (I can't call it more) of a moustache. I had also an impression of a Panama hat, which came off in compliment to me, a gray flannel suit, the latest kind of collar (you know "Sissy Williams says, 'the feeling is for low ones this year'!") and mustard-coloured boots. All that sounds hideous, I know, yet it was n't. At first sight it was rather attractive, but it lost its attractiveness in a flash when it mistook the nature of my smile.

You would n't believe that a nice, clean little British face could change so much for the worse in about the eighth part of a second! It could n't have taken longer, or I should n't have seen, because it happened between my smile and my walking on. But I did see. A disagreeable kind of lighting up in the eyes, which instantly made them look full of — consciousness of sex, is the only way I can express it. And instead of being inoffensive, boyish, blue beads, they were suddenly transformed into the sharp, whitey-gray sort that the Neapolitans "make horns" at.

Well, all that was nothing to fuss about, for even *I* know that misguided youths from Surbiton or Pawtucket, who are quite harmless at home, think they owe it to themselves to be gay dogs when they run over to Paris, otherwise they 'll not get their money's worth. If it had n't been for what came afterward I would n't be wasting paper and ink on a silly young bounder. As it is, I 'll just tell you what happened and see if you think I was to blame, or whether there 's likely to be any bother.

At that change my look slid off the self-conceited face, like rain off a particularly slippery duck's back. He ought to have known then, if he had n't before, that I considered him a mere It, but I can just imagine his saying to himself: "This is Paris, and I 've paid five pounds for a return ticket. Must have something to tell the chaps. What 's a girl doing out alone?"

He came after me and said I 'd dropped something. So I had. It was a rose. I was going to disclaim it, with all the haughty grace of a broomstick, when suddenly I remembered that it was my *carte d'identité*, so to speak. The Dragon had prescribed it in his last letter to Madame de Maluet about meeting Ellaline. As there might be difficulty in recognition if she came to the station with a chaperon as strange to him as herself, it would be well, he suggested, that each pinned a red rose on her dress. Then he would look out for two ladies with two roses.

I could n't make myself into two ladies with two roses, but I must be one lady with one rose, otherwise the Dragon and I might miss each other, and he would go out to Versailles to see what the dickens was the matter. Then the fat would be in the fire, with a vengeance!

You see, I had to say "Yes" to the rose, because there was n't time to call at a florist's and try to buy another red label before going on to the Gare de Lyon. I put out my hand with a "thank you" that sounded as if it needed oiling, but, as if on second thought the silly idiot asked if he might keep the flower for himself. "It looks like an English rose," said he, with a glance which transferred the compliment to me.

"Certainly not — sir," said I. "I need it myself."

"If that 's all, you might let me give you a whole bunch to make up for it," said he.

Then I said, "Go away," which may n't have been elegant, but was to the point. And I walked on with long steps toward the place where there were cabs. But quite a short man is as tall as a tall girl, and his steps were as long as mine.

"I say," said he, "you need n't be so cross. What 's the harm, as long as we 're both English, and this is Paris?"

"I 'm not English," I snapped. "If you don't go away I 'll call a gendarme."

"You will look a fool if you do. A great tall girl like you," said he, trying to be funny. And it did sound funny. I suppose I must have been pretty nervous, after all I 'd gone through with Ellaline, for I almost giggled, but I did n't, quite. On the contrary, I marched on like a war-cloud about to burst, and proved my non-British origin by addressing a cabman in the Parisian French I 've inherited from you. I hoped that the boy could n't understand, but he did.

"Mademoiselle, I have to go to the Gare de Lyon, too," he announced, "and it would be a very friendly act, and

show that you forgive me, if you 'd let me take you there in a taxi-motor, which you 'll find much nicer than that old Noah's ark you 're engaging."

"I don't forgive you," I said, as I mounted into the alleged ark. "Your only excuse is that you 're not grown up yet."

With that Parthian shot I ordered my *cocher*, who was furtively grinning by this time, to drive on as quickly as possible.

Of course the horrid child from Surbiton or somewhere did n't have to go to the Gare de Lyon; but evidently he regarded me as his last hope of an adventure before returning to his native heath or duckpond; so, naturally, he followed in a taxi-motor, whose turbulent, goodness-knows-what-horse-power had to be subdued to one-half-horse gait. I did n't look behind, but I felt in my bones — my funny bones — that he was there. And when I arrived at the Gare de Lyon so did he.

The train I 'd come to meet was a P. and O. Special, or whatever you call it, and it was n't in yet, so I had to wait.

"Cats may look at kings," said my gay cavalier.

"Cads may n't though," said I. Perhaps I ought to have maintained a dignified silence, but that *mot* was irresistible.

"You *are* hard on a chap," said he. "I tell you what. I 've been thinking a lot about you, mademoiselle, and I believe you 're up to some little game of your own. When the cat 's away the mice will play. You 've got rid of your friend, and you 're out for a lark on your own. What?"

Oh, would n't I have loved to box his ears! But this time I was dignified and turned my back on him. Luckily, the train came puffing into the station, and he ceased to bother me actively, for the time; but the worst is to follow.

Now I think I 've got to the part of my story where the Dragon ought to appear.

Suddenly, as the train stopped, that platform of a Paris railway station was turned into a thoroughly English scene. A wave from Great Britain swept over it, a tall and tweedy wave, bearing with it golf clubs and kitbags and every kind of English flotsam and jetsam. All the passengers had lately landed from the foreignest of foreign parts, coral strands, and that sort of remote thing, but they looked as incorruptibly, triumphantly British, every man, woman, and child of them (except a fringe of black or brown servants), as if they had strolled over from across Channel for a Saturday to Monday in "gay Paree." One can't help admiring as well as wondering at that sort of ineradicable, persistent Britishness, can one? I believe it 's partly the secret of Great Britain's success in colonizing. Her people are so calmly sure of their superiority over all other races that the other races end by believing it, and trying to imitate their ways, instead of fighting to maintain the right to their own.

That feeling came over me as I, a mere French and American chit, stood aside to let the wave flow on. Everyone looked so important, and unaware of the existence of foreigners, except porters, that I was afraid my particular drop of the wave might sail by on the crest, without noticing me or my red rose. I tried to make myself little, and the

rose big, as if it were in the foreground and I in the perspective, but the procession moved on and nobody who could possibly have been the Dragon wasted a glance on me.

Toward the tail end, however, I spied two men coming, followed by a small bronze figure in "native" dress of some sort. One of the two was tall and tanned, and thirty-five or so. The other — I had a bet with myself that he was my Dragon. But it was like "betting on a certainty," which is one of the few things that 's dull and dishonest at the same time. Some men are born dragons, while others only achieve dragonhood, or have it thrust upon them by the gout. This one was born a dragon, and exactly what I 'd imagined him, or even worse, and I was glad that I could conscientiously hate him in peace.

The other man had the walk so many Englishmen have, as if he were tracking lions across a desert. I quite admire that gait, for it looks brave and un-self-conscious; but the old thing labelled "Dragon" marched along as if trampling on prostrate Bengalese. A red-hot Tory, of course — that went without saying — of the type that thinks Radicals deserve hanging. In his eyes that stony glare which English people have when they 're afraid someone may be wanting to know them; chicken-claws under his chin, like you see in the necks of elderly bull dogs; a snobbish nose; a bad-tempered mouth; age anywhere between sixty and a hundred. Altogether one of those men who must write to the *Times* or go mad. Dost like the picture?

Both these men, who were walking together, looked at me rather hard; and I attributed the Dragon's failure to

stop at the Sign of the Rose to the silly vanity which forbade his wearing "specs" like a sensible old gentleman. Accordingly, with laudable presence of mind, I did what seemed the only thing to do.

I stepped forward, and addressed him with the modest firmness Madame de Maluet's pupils are taught in "deportment lessons." "I beg your pardon, but are n't you Sir Lionel Pendragon?"

"I am Lionel Pendragon," said the other man — the quite young man.

Mother, you could have knocked me down with the shadow of a moth-eaten feather!

They both took off their travelling caps. The real Dragon's was in decent taste. The Mock Dragon's displayed an offensive chess-board check.

"Have you come to say — that Miss Lethbridge has been prevented from meeting me?" asked the real one — the R. D., I 'll call him for the moment.

"I am ——" It stuck in my throat and would n't go up or down, so I compromised — which was weak of me, as I always think on principle you 'd better lie all in all or not at all. "I suppose you don't recognize me?" I mumbled fluffily.

"What — it 's not possible that you 're Ellaline Lethbridge!" the R. D. exclaimed, in surprise, which might mean horror of my person or a compliment.

I gasped like a fish out of water, and wriggled my neck in a silly way, which a charitable man, unaccustomed to women, might take for schoolgirl gawkishness in a spasm of acquiescence.

Instantly he put out his hand and wrung mine extremely

hard. It would have crunched the real Ellaline's rings into her poor little fingers.

"You must forgive me," he said. "I saw the rose "— and he smiled a wonderfully agreeable, undragonlike smile, which put him back to thirty-two — "but I was looking out for a very different sort of — er — young lady."

"Why?" I asked, losing my presence of mind.

"I — well, really, I don't know why," said he.

"And I was looking for a very different sort of man," I retorted, feeling idiotically schoolgirlish, and sillier every minute.

He smiled again then, even more nicely than before, and followed the example I had set. "Why?" he inquired.

Unlike him, I did know why only too well. But it was difficult to explain. Still, I had to say something or make things worse. "When in doubt play a trump, or tell the truth," I quoted to myself as a precept; and said out aloud that, somehow or other, I 'd thought he would be old.

"So I am old," he said, "old enough to be your father." When he added that information, he looked as if he would have liked to take it back again, and his face coloured up with a dull, painful red, as if he 'd said something attached to a disagreeable memory. That was what his expression suggested to me; but as I know for a fact that he has not at all a nice, kind character, I suppose in reality what he felt was only a stupid prick of vanity at having inadvertently given his age away. I nearly blurted out the truth about mine, which would have got me into hot water at once, as Ellaline 's hardly nineteen and I 'm practically twenty-one — worse luck for you.

By this time the Mock Dragon had walked slowly on, but the brown image in "native" dress had glued himself to the platform near by, too respectful to be aware of my existence. While I was debating whether or no the last speech called for an answer, the R. D. had a sudden thought which gave him an excuse to change the subject.

"Where 's your chaperon?" he snapped, with a flash of the eye, which was his first betrayal of the hidden devil within him.

"She was called away to visit a relative," I answered, promptly; because Ellaline and I had agreed I was to say that; and in a way it was true.

"You did n't come here alone?" said he.

"I had to," said I.

"Then it 's a monstrous thing that Madame de Maluet should have let you," he growled. "I shall write and tell her so."

"Oh, don't, please don't," I begged, you can guess how anxiously. "She really *could n't* help it, and I shall be so sorry to distress her." He was still glaring, and desperation made me crafty. "You would n't refuse the first thing I 've asked you?" I tried to wheedle him.

I hoped — for Ellaline's sake, of course — that I should get another smile; but instead, I got a frown.

"Now I begin to realize that you are — your mother's daughter," said he, in a queer, hard tone. "No, I won't refuse the first thing you ask me. But perhaps you 'd better not consider that a precedent."

"I won't," said I. He 'd been looking so pleased with me before, as if he 'd found me in a prize package, or won me in a lottery when he 'd expected to draw a blank; but

though he gave in without a struggle to my wheedling, he now looked as if he 'd discovered that I was stuffed with sawdust. My quick, "I won't," did n't seem to encourage him a bit.

"Well," he said, in a duller tone, "we 'll get out of this. It was very kind of you to come and meet me. I see now I ought n't to have asked it; but to tell the truth, the thought of going to a girls' school, and claiming you ——"

"I quite understand," I nipped in. "This is much better. My luggage is all here," I added. "I could n't think where else to send it, as I did n't know what your plans might be."

At that he looked annoyed again, but luckily, only with himself this time. "I fear I am an ass where women's affairs are concerned," he said. "Of course I ought to have thought about your luggage, and settled every detail for you with Madame de Maluet, instead of trusting to her discretion. Still, it does seem as if she ——"

I would n't let him blame Madame; but I could n't defend her without risking danger for Ellaline and myself, because Madame's arrangements were all perfect, if we had n't secretly upset them. "I have so *little* luggage," I broke in, trying to make up with emphasis for irrelevancy. "And Madame considers me quite a grown-up person, I assure you."

"I suppose you are," he admitted, observing my inches with a worried air. "I ought to have realized; but somehow or other I expected to find a child."

"I shall be less bother to you than if I were a child," I consoled him.

This did make him smile again, for some reason, as he

replied that he was n't sure. And we were starting to hook ourselves on to the tail end of the dwindling procession, quite on friendly terms, when to my horror that young English cadlet — or boundling, which you will — strolled calmly out in front of us, and said, "How do you do, Sir Lionel Pendragon? I 'm afraid you don't remember me. Dick Burden. Anyhow, you 'll recollect my mother and aunt."

I had forgotten all about the creature, dearest; but there he had been lurking, ready to pounce. And what bad luck that he should know Ellaline's guardian, was n't it?

At first I thought maybe he really had had business at the Gare de Lyon, and that I 'd partly misjudged him. And then it flashed into my head that, on the contrary, he did n't really know Sir Lionel, but had overheard the name, and was doing a "bluff" to get introduced to me. Was n't that a conceited idea? But neither was true. At least the latter was n't, I know, and I 'm pretty sure the first was n't. What I think, is this: that he simply followed me to the Gare de Lyon for the "deviltry" of the thing, and because he 'd nothing better to do. That he hung about in sheer curiosity, to see whom I was meeting; and that he recognized the Dragon as an old acquaintance. I once fondly supposed coincidences were remarkable and rare events, but I 've known ever since I 've known the troubles of life that it 's only agreeable ones which are rare, such as coming across your long-lost millionaire-uncle who 's decided to leave you all his money, just as you 'd made up your mind to commit suicide or marry a Jewish diamond merchant. Disagreeable coincidences sit about on damp clouds ready to fall on you the minute

they think you don't expect them, and they 're more likely to occur than not. That 's my experience. Evidently the Dragon did remember Dick's mother and aunt, for the first blankness of his expression brightened into intelligence with the mention of the youth's female belongings. He held out his hand cordially, and remarked that of course he remembered Mrs. Burden and Mrs. Senter. As for Dick, he had grown out of all recollection.

"It was a good many years ago," returned the said Dick, hastening to disprove the slur of youthfulness. "It was just before I went to Sandhurst. But you have n't changed. I knew you at once."

"On leave, I suppose?" suggested Sir Lionel.

"No," said Dick, "I 'm not in the army. Failed. Truth is, I did n't want to get in. Was n't cut out for it. There 's only one profession I care for."

"What 's that?" the Dragon was obliged to ask, out of politeness, though I don't think he cared much.

"The fact is," returned Mr. Burden (a most appropriate name, according to my point of view), "it 's rather a queer one, or might seem so to you, and I 've promised the mater I won't talk of it unless I do adopt it. And I 'm over here qualifying, now."

It was easy to see that he hoped he 'd excited our curiosity; and he must have been disappointed in Sir Lionel's half-hearted "Indeed?" As for me, I tried to make my eyes look like boiled gooseberries, an unenthusiastic fruit, especially when cooked. I was delighted with the Dragon, though, for not introducing him.

Having said "indeed," Sir Lionel added that we must be getting on — luggage to see to; his valet a foreigner,

and more bother than use. I took my cue, and pattered along by my guardian's side, his tall form a narrow yet impassable bulwark between me and Mr. Dick Burden. But Mr. D. B. pattered too, refusing to be thrown off.

He asked Sir Lionel if he were staying on in Paris; and in the short conversation that followed I picked up morsels of news which had n't been given me yet. It appeared that the Dragon's sister (who would suspect a dragon of sisters?) had wired to Marseilles that she would meet him in Paris, and he "expected to find her at an hotel." He did n't say what hotel, so it was evident Mr. Dick Burden need not hope for an invitation to call. Apparently our plans depended somewhat on her, but Sir Lionel "thought we should get away next day at latest." There was nothing to keep him in Paris, and he was in a hurry to reach England. I was glad to hear that, for fear some more coincidences might happen, such as meeting Madame de Maluet or one of the teachers holiday-making. Conscience does make you a coward! I never noticed mine much before. I wish you could take anti-conscience powders, as you do for neuralgia. Would n't they sell like hot cakes?

At last Mr. Dick Burden had to go away without getting the introduction he wanted, and Sir Lionel was either very absent-minded or else very obstinate not to give it, I 'm not sure which; but if I were a betting character I should bet on the latter. I begin to see that his dragonness may be expected to leak out in his attitude toward Woman as a Sex. Already I 've detected the most primitive, almost primæval, ideas in him, which probably he contracted in Bengal. Would you believe it, he insisted

on my putting on a veil to travel with? — but I have n't come to that part yet.

As for Mr. Burden, as I said, he disappeared from our view; but I doubt if we disappeared from his. You may think this is conceited in me, but, as he took off his Panama in saying good-bye, he contrived to peer at me round an unfortified corner of the Dragon, and the look he flung me said more plainly than words: "This is all right, but I 'm hanged if I don't see it through," or something even more emphatic to that effect.

Sir Lionel was surprised when he saw my luggage, which we picked up when he 'd claimed his own.

"I thought young ladies never went anywhere without a dozen boxes," said he.

"Oh, mamma and I travelled half over Europe with only one trunk and two bags between us," I blurted out, before I stopped to think. Then I wished the floor would yawn and swallow me up.

He did stare! — and his eyes are dreadfully piercing when he stares. They are very nice-looking gray ones; but I can tell you they felt like hatpins.

"I should have thought you were too young in those days to know anything about luggage," said he.

That gave me a straw to clutch. "Madame de Maluet has told me a great deal." (So she has, about one thing or another; mostly my own faults.)

"Oh, I see," he said. It must have seemed funny to him, my saying that about the trunks, as Ellaline's mother died when E. was four.

He had n't much luggage, either; no golf clubs, or battle-axes, or whatever you play about with in Bengal when

you are n't terrorizing the natives. He sent the brown servant off in one cab with our things, and put me in another, into which he also mounted. It did seem funny driving off with him, for when I came to think of it, I was never alone with a man before; but he was gawkier about it than I was. Not exactly shy; I hardly know how to express it, but he could n't help showing that he was out of his element.

Oh, I forgot to tell you, he 'd shaken hands with the Mock Dragon, and shunted him off just as ruthlessly as he did the boy. "See you in London, sooner or later," said he. As if anyone could want to see such a disagreeable old thing! Yet, perhaps, if I but knew, the Mock Dragon's character may be the nobler of the two. If I were to judge by appearances, I should have liked the real Dragon's looks, and thought from first sight that he was rather a brave, fine, high-principled person, even unselfish. Whereas I know from all Ellaline has told me that his qualities are quite the reverse of these.

We were going to the Grand Hotel, and driving there he pumped up a few perfunctory sort of questions about school, the way grown-up people who don't understand children talk to little girls. You know: "Do you like your lessons? What do you do on holidays? What is your middle name?" sort of thing. I was afraid I should laugh, so I asked him questions instead; and all the time he seemed to be studying me in a puzzled, surprised way, as if I were a duck that had just stepped out of a chicken egg, or a goblin in a Nonconformist home. (If he keeps on doing this, I shall *have* to find out what he means by it, or *burst*.)

I asked him about his sister, as I thought Bengal might be a sore subject, and he appeared to think that I already knew something of her. If Ellaline does know, she forgot to tell me; and I hope other things like that won't be continually cropping up, or my nerves won't stand it. *I* shall take to throwing spoons and tea-cups.

He reminded me of her name being Mrs. Norton, and that she 's a widow. He had n't expected her to come over, he said, and he was surprised to get her telegram, but no doubt he 'd find out that she 'd a pretty good reason. And it was nothing to be astonished at, her not meeting him at the Gare de Lyon, for she invariably missed people when she went to railway stations. It had been a characteristic of hers since youth. When they were both young they were often in Paris together, for they had French cousins (Ellaline's mother's people, I suppose), and then they stopped at the Grand Hotel. He had n't been there, though, he added, for nearly twenty years; and had been out of England, without coming back, for fifteen. That made him seem old, talking of what happened twenty years ago — almost my whole life. Yet he does n't look more than thirty-five at most. I wonder does the climate of Bengal preserve people, like flies in amber? Perhaps he 's really sixty, and has this unnatural appearance of youth.

"Does Mrs. Norton know about — me?" I asked.

"Why, of course she does," said he. "I wrote her she must come and live with me when I found I 'd got to have ——" He shut up like a clam, on that, and looked so horribly ashamed of himself that I burst out laughing.

"Please don't mind," said I. "I know I 'm an incubus, but I 'll try to be as little trouble as possible."

"You 're *not* an incubus," he contradicted me, almost indignantly. "You 're entirely different from what I thought you would be."

"Oh, then you thought I *would* be an incubus?" I could n't resist the temptation of retorting. Maybe it was cruel, but there 's no society for the prevention of cruelty to dragons, so it can't be considered wrong in humane circles.

"Not at all. But I — I don't know much about women, especially girls," said he. "And I told you I thought of you as a child."

"I hope you have n't gone to the trouble of engaging a nurse for me?" I suggested. And if he were cross at being teased, he did n't show it. He said he 'd trusted all such arrangements to his sister. He had n't seen her for many years, but she was good-natured, and he hoped that we would get on. What I principally hoped was that she would n't prove to be of a *suspicious* nature; for a detective on the hearth would be inconvenient, and women can be so sharp about each other! I 've found that out at Madame de Maluet's; I never would from you, dear. You were n't a cat in any of your previous incarnations. I think you must have "evoluted" from that neat blending of serpent and dove which eventually produces a perfect Parisienne.

We went into the big hall of the Grand Hotel, where Sir Lionel said in "his day" carriages used to drive in; and suddenly, to my own surprise, I felt gay and excited, as if this were life, and I had begun to live. I did n't

regret having to play Ellaline one bit. Everything seemed great fun. You know, darling, I have n't had much "life," except in you and books, since I was sixteen, and our pennies and jauntings finished up at the same time; though I had plenty before that — all sorts of "samples," anyhow. I suppose it must have been the bright, worldly look of the hotel which gave me that tingling sensation, as if a little wild bird had burst into song in my heart.

Although it 's out of season for Parisians, the hall was full of fashionable-seeming people, mostly Americans and other foreigners. As we came in, a lady rose from a seat near the door. She was small, and the least fashionable or well-dressed person in the room, yet with the air of being satisfied with herself morally. I saw at once she was of the type who considers her church a "home from home"; who dresses her house as if it were a person, and upholsters herself as if she were a sofa. Of course, I knew it was Mrs. Norton, and I *was* disappointed. I would almost have preferred her to be catty.

She and her brother had n't seen each other for fifteen years, but they met as calmly as if they had lunched together yesterday. I think, though, that was more her fault than his, for when he held out his hand she lifted it up on a level with her chin to shake; and of course that would have taken the "go" out of a grasshopper. I suppose it would n't have been "good form" to kiss in a hotel hall, but if *I* retrieved a long-lost brother in any sort of hall, I don't believe I could resist.

Her hair was so plainly drawn back, it was like a moral influence, and her toque sat up high on her head like a bun

or a travelling pincushion. The only trimming on her dress was buttons, but there were a large family of them.

Sir Lionel introduced us, and she said she was pleased to meet me. Also, that I was not at all like my mother or father. Then she asked if I had ever been to England; but luckily, before I 'd had a chance to compromise myself by saying that I 'd lived a few months in London, but had been nowhere else (there 's where our money began to give out), her brother reminded her that I was only four when I left England.

"Of course, I had forgotten," said Mrs. Norton. "But don't they ever take them over to see the British Museum or the National Gallery? I should have thought it would be an education — with cheap returns."

"Probably French schoolmistresses believe that their pupils get their money's worth on the French side of the Channel," replied Sir Lionel.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Norton; and looked at me as if to see how the system had answered. I 'm sure she approved of the gray serge and the sailor hat more than she approved of the girl in them. You see, I don't think she sanctions hair that is n't dark brown.

We did n't sit down, but talked standing up, Sir Lionel and his sister throwing me words out of politeness now and then. She has a nice voice, though cold as iced water that has been filtered. Her name is Emily. It *would* be!

He said he was surprised as well as pleased to get her telegram on arriving at Marseilles, and it was very good of her to come to Paris and meet him. She said not at all, it was no trouble, but a pleasure, or rather it would be, if it were n't for the sad reason that brought her.

"Why, is anybody dead?" asked Sir Lionel, looking as if he were running over a list in his head, but could n't call up a name which concerned him personally.

"There 's been a thinning off among old friends lately, I 'm sorry to say; I 've told you about most of them, I think, in postscripts," replied Mrs. Norton. "But it was n't their loss, poor dears, which brought me over. It was the fire."

"What fire?" her brother wanted to know.

"Why, *your* fire. Surely you must have seen about it in to-day's London papers?"

"To-day's London papers won't get to Marseilles till to-morrow, and I have n't been long enough in Paris to see one yet," explained Sir Lionel. "Have I had a serious fire, and what has been burnt?" He spoke as coolly as if it were the question of a mutton chop.

"Part of the house," returned Mrs. Norton, not even trying to break it to him.

"I hope not the old part," said he.

"No, it is the new wing. But *that* seemed to me such a pity. Such a beautiful bathroom, hot and cold, spray and shower, quite destroyed; and a noble linen closet, heated throughout with pipes, and fully stocked."

"The bathroom may have been early Pullman, and the linen closet late German Lloyd, my dear Emily; but the rest of the house is Tudor, and can't be replaced," said Sir Lionel; and I was sure, as he looked down at his sister, of a thing I 'd already suspected: that he has a sense of humour. That 's a modern improvement with which you would n't expect a dragon to be fitted; but I begin to see that this is an elaborate and complicated Dragon.

Some people are Pharisees about their sense of humour, and keep harping on it till you wish it were a live wire and would electrocute them. *He* would rather be ashamed of his, I fancy, and yet it must have amused him, and made him feel good chums with himself, away out in Bengal.

Mrs. Norton said that Warings had very handsome Tudor dining-rooms in one or two of their model houses, so nothing was irrevocable nowadays; but she was pleased, if he was, that only the modern wing was injured. It had happened yesterday morning, just too late for the newspapers, which must have annoyed the editors; and she had felt that it would be best to undertake the journey to Paris, and consult about plans, as it might make a difference (here she glanced at me); but she had n't mentioned the fire when wiring, because things seemed worse in telegrams, and besides, it would have been a useless expense. No doubt it had been stupid of her, but she had fancied he would certainly see it in the paper, with all details, and therefore guess why she was meeting him.

"We have nowhere to take Miss Lethbridge," said she, "since Graylees Castle will be overrun with workmen for some time to come. I did n't know but you might feel it would be best, after all, for us to put her again in charge of her old schoolmistress for a few weeks."

If hair could really rise, mine would have instantly cast out every hairpin, as if they were so many evil spirits, and have stood out all around my head like Strumpelpeter's. Yet there was nothing I could say. If I were mistress of a dozen languages, I should have had to be speechless in every one. But I saw Sir Lionel looking at

me, and I hastily gave him a silent treatment with my eyes. It had the most satisfactory effect.

"No, I don't think we will take her back to Madame de Maluet's," said he. Madame may have made other plans for the holiday season. Perhaps she is going away."

"I 'm sure she is," said I. "She is going to visit her mother-in-law's aunt."

Sir Lionel was still looking at me, lost in thought. (I forget if I mentioned that he has nice eyes? I have n't time to look back and see if I did, now. I 'm scribbling as fast as I can. We shall soon land, and I want to post this at Dover, if I can get an English stamp "off" someone, as "Sissy" Williams, our only British neighbour, says.)

"How would you like a motor-car trip?" Sir Lionel asked abruptly.

The relief from suspense was almost too great, and I nearly jumped down his throat, so, after all, it would have been my own fault if the Dragon had eaten me. "I should *adore* it!" I said.

"My dear!" protested Mrs. Norton, indulgently. "One adores Heavenly Beings."

"I 'm not sure a motor-car is n't a heavenly being," said I, "though perhaps without capitals."

The Dragon smiled, but she looked awfully shocked, and no doubt blamed Madame de Maluet.

"I 've a forty-horse Mercédès promised to be ready on my arrival," said Sir Lionel, still reflective. "You know, Emily, the little twelve-horse-power car I had sent out to East Bengal was a Mercédès. If I could drive her, I can

drive a bigger car. Everybody says it 's easier. And young Nick has learned to be a first-rate mechanic."

I suppose young Nick must be the Dragon's pet name for the bronze image. What fun that he should be a chauffeur! Fancy an Indian Idol squatted on the front seat of an up-to-date automobile. But when you come to think of it, there have been other gods in cars. I only hope, if I 'm to be behind him, this one won't behave like Juggernaut. He wears almost too many clothes, for he is the type that *would* look over-dressed in a bangle.

"We might have an eight or ten weeks' run about England," the Dragon went on, "while things are being made straight at Graylees. It would be good to see something of the blessed old island again before settling down."

"One would think you were quite pleased at the fire, Lionel," remarked his sister, who evidently believes it wrong to look on the bright side of things, and right to expect the worst — like an undertaker calling for a client before he 's dead.

"What is, is," returned he. "We may as well make the best of it. You would n't mind a motor tour, would you, Emily?"

"I would go if it were my duty, and you desired it," she said, looking as if she ought to be on stained glass, with half a halo, "only I am hardly young enough to consider motoring as a pleasure."

"There are n't many years between us," replied her brother, too polite to say whether he were in front or behind, "but I confess I do regard it as a pleasure."

"A man is different," she admitted.

Thank goodness, he is!

Then they talked more about the fire, which, it seems, happened through something being wrong with a flue, in a room where Mrs. N. had told a servant to build a fire on account of dampness. It must be a wonderful old place from what they both let drop. (I told you in another letter how Sir Lionel had inherited it, about the same time as his title, or a little later. The estate, though, comes from the mother's side, and her people were from Warwickshire.) His cool British way of saying and taking things is a good deal on the surface, I think. He would have hated us to see it, but I 'm sure he worked himself up to quite a pitch of joyful excitement over the idea of the motor trip, as it developed in his mind. And it *is* splendid, is n't it, darling?

You know how sorry you were we had n't been more economical, and made our money last long enough to travel in England, instead of having to stop short after a splash in London. Now I 'm going to see bits in spite of all, until I 'm "called away," and I 'll try my best, in letters, to make you see what I do. Ellaline would n't have enjoyed such a tour, for she hates the country, or any place where it is n't suitable to wear high heels and picture hats. But I — oh, I! Twenty dragons on the same seat of the car with me could n't prevent my revelling in it — though it may be cut short for me at any minute. As for Mrs. Norton ——

But the stewardess has just said we shall be in, in five minutes. I had to come down to the ladies' cabin with Mrs. N. Now I have n't time to tell you any more, except that they both (Sir L. and his sister, I mean) wanted to get to England as soon as possible. I know *she* was

disappointed not to fling her brother's ward back to Madame de Maluet, and probably would n't have come over to Paris if she had n't hoped to bring it off; but she resigns herself to things easily when a man says they 're best. It was Sir Lionel who wanted particularly to cross to-night, though he did n't urge it; but she said, "Very well, dear. I think you 're right."

So here we are. A large bell is ringing, and so is my heart. I mean it 's beating. Good-bye, dearest. I 'll write again to-morrow — or rather to-day, for it 's a lovely sunrise, like a good omen — when we get settled somewhere. I believe we 're going to a London hotel. Yes, stewardess. Oh, I ought to have said that to her, instead of writing it to you. She interrupted.

Love — love.

Your AUDRIE,
Their ELLALINE.

V

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Ritz Hotel, London, July 8th

ANGEL: May your wings never moult! I hope you did n't think me extravagant wiring yesterday, instead of writing. I was too busy baking the yeasty dough of my impressions to write a letter worth reading; and when one has practically *no* money, what 's the good of being economical? You know the sole point of sympathy I ever touched with "Sissy" Williams was his famous speech: "If I can't earn five hundred a year, it 's not worth while worrying to earn anything"; which excused his settling down as a "remittance man," in the top flat, at forty francs a month.

Dearest, the Dragon has n't drag-ged once, yet! And, by the way, till he does so, I think I won't call him Dragon again. It 's rather gratuitous, as I 'm eating his bread — or rather, his perfectly gorgeous *à la cartes*, and am literally smeared with luxury, from my rising up until my lying down, at his expense.

I know, and you know, because I repeated it word for word, that Ellaline said she thought he must have been well paid for undertaking to "guardian" her, as his hard, selfish type does nothing for nothing; and she has always seemed so very rich (quite *the* heiress of the school, envied

for her dresses and privileges) that there might be temptations for an unscrupulous man to pick up a few plums here and there. But — well, of course Ellaline ought to know, after being his ward ever since she was four, and hearing things on the best authority about the horrid way he treated her mother, as well as suffering from his cruel heartlessness all these years. Never a letter written to herself; never the least little present; never a wish to hear from her, or see her photograph; all business carried on between himself and Madame de Maluet, who is too discreet to prejudice a ward against a guardian. And I — I saw him only day before yesterday for the first time. What *can* I know about him? I 've no experience in reading characters of men. The dear old Abbé and a few masters in the school are the only ones I have a bowing acquaintance with — except "Sissy" Williams, who does n't count. It 's dangerous to trust to one's instincts, no doubt, for it 's so difficult to be sure a wish is n't disguising itself as instinct, in rouge and a golden wig.

But then, there 's the man's profile, which is of the knight-of-old, Crusader pattern, a regular hook to hang respect upon, though I 'd be doing it injustice if I let you imagine it 's *shaped* like a hook. It is n't; it 's quite beautiful; and you find yourself furtively, semi-consciously sketching it in air with your forefinger as you look at it. It suggests race, and *noblesse oblige*, and a long line of soldier ancestors, and that sort of thing, such as you used to say survived visibly among the English aristocracy and English peasantry (not in the mixed-up middle classes) more markedly than anywhere else. That must mean some correspondence in character, must n't it? Or can it

be a mask, handed down by noble ancestry to cover up moral defects in a degenerate descendant?

Am I gabbling school-girl gush, or am I groping toward light? You know what I want to say, anyhow. The impression Sir Lionel Pendragon makes on me would be different if he had n't been described by Ellaline. I should have supposed him quite easy to read, if he 'd happened upon me, unheralded — as a big ship looms over a little bark, on the high sea. I 'd have thought him a simple enough, straightforward character in that case. I should have put him in the class with his own Tudor castle — not that I 've ever yet seen a Tudor castle, except in photographs or on postcards. But I 'd have said to myself: If he 'd been born a house instead of a man, he 'd have been built centuries and centuries ago, by strong barons who knew exactly what they wanted, and grabbed it. He 'd have been a castle, an *early* Tudor castle, battlemented and surrounded by a moat, fortified, of course, and impregnable to the enemy, unless they treacherously blew him up. He would have had several secret rooms, but they would contain chests of treasure, not nasty skeletons.

Now you understand exactly what I 'd be thinking of the alleged Dragon, if it were n't for Ellaline. But as it is, I don't know what to think of him. That 's why I describe him as elaborate and complicated, because, I suppose, he must be totally different inside from what he seems outside.

Anyhow, I don't care — it 's lovely being at the Ritz. And we 're in the newspapers this morning, Emily and I shining by reflected light; mine doubly reflected, like the

earth's light shining on to the moon, and from that being passed on to something else — some poor little chipped meteorite strayed out of the Milky Way.

It was Mrs. Norton who discovered the article about Sir Lionel — half a column — in the *Morning Post* and she sent out for lots of other papers without saying anything to her brother, for — according to her — he "hates that sort of thing."

I did n't have time to tell you in my last that she was sick crossing the Channel (though it was as smooth as if it had been ironed, and only a few wrinkles left in), but apparently she considers it good form for a female to be slightly ill in a ladylike way on boats; so, of course, she is. And as I was decent to her, she decided to like me better than she thought she would at first. For some reason they *both* seemed prejudiced against me (I mean against Ellaline) to begin with. I can't think why; and slowly, with unconcealable surprise, they are changing their minds. Changing one's mind keeps one's soul nice and clean and fresh; so theirs will be well aired, owing to me.

Emily has become quite resigned to my existence, and doles me out small confidences. She has not a rich nature, to begin with, and it has never been fertilized much, so it 's rather sterile; but no noxious weeds, anyhow, as there *may* be in Sir Lionel's more generous and cultivated soil. I think I shall get on with her pretty well after all, especially motoring, when I can take her with plenty of ozone. She is a little afraid of her brother, though he 's five years younger than she (I 've now learned), but extremely proud of him; and it was quite pathetic, her cutting out the stuff about him in the papers, this morning, and show-

ing every bit to me, before pasting all in a book she has been keeping for years, entirely concerned with Sir Lionel. She says she will show that to me, too, some day, but I must n't tell him. As if I would!

But about the newspapers. She did n't order any Radical ones, because she said they were always down on the aristocracy, and unjust as well as stupid; but she got one by mistake, and you 've no idea how delighted the poor little woman was when it praised her brother up to the skies. Then she said there were *some* decent Radicals, after all.

Of course, one knows the difference between "Mirabeau judged by his friends and Mirabeau judged by the people," and can make allowances (if one's digestion 's good) for points of view. But there 's one thing certain, whether he 's angel or devil, or something hybrid between the two, Sir Lionel Pendragon is a man of importance in the Public Eye. I wonder if Ellaline realizes his importance in that way? I can't think she does, or she would have mentioned it, as it need n't have interfered with her opinion of his private character.

It 's a little through Emily, but mostly from the newspaper cuttings, that I 've got my knowledge of what he 's done, and been, and is expected to be.

He 's forty. I know that, because the *Morning Post* gave the date of his birth, and he 's rather a swell, although only a baronet, and not even that till a short time ago. It appears that the family on both sides goes back into the mists of antiquity, in the days when legend, handed down by word of mouth (*can* you hand things out of your mouth? Sounds rude), was the forerunner of his-

tory. His father's ancestors are supposed to be descended from King Arthur; hence the "Pendragon"; though, I suppose, if it 's true, King Arthur must really have been married several times, as say the vulgar records of which Tennyson very properly takes no notice. There have been dukes and earls in the family, but they have somehow disappeared, perhaps because in those benighted days there were no American heiresses to keep them up.

It seems that Sir Lionel was a soldier to begin with, and was dreadfully wounded in some frontier fight in India when he was very young. He nearly lost the use of his left arm, and gave up the army; but he got the Victoria Cross. Ellaline did n't say a word about that. Maybe she does n't know. After I 'd read his "dossier" in the paper, I could n't resist asking him at lunch what he had done to deserve the V. C.

"Nothing to deserve it," he answered, looking surprised.

"To get it, then?" I twisted my question round.

"Oh, I don't know — almost forget. Pulled some silly ass out of a hole, I believe," said he

That 's what you get for asking this sort of Englishman questions about his past. I thought it was only widows with auburn hair you must n't talk to about their pasts.

"A grateful Government" (according to the *Morning Post*) "sent young Pendragon, at the age of twenty-five, to East Bengal, as private secretary to Sir John Hurley, who was lieutenant-governor at that time"; and it 's an ill Governor, so to speak, who blows no one any good. Sir John's liver was so tired of Bengal, that he had to take it away, and Lieutenant Pendragon (as he was then) looked after things till another man could arrive. He

looked after them so brilliantly, that when the next lieutenant-governor did something silly, and was asked to resign, our incipient Sir Lionel was invited to take on the job. He was only thirty, and so he has been lieutenant-governor for ten years. Now he 's going to see whether he likes being a baronet better, and having castles and motor-cars. All the papers I saw praised him tremendously, and said that in a crisis which might have been disastrous he had averted a catastrophe by his remarkable strength of character and presence of mind. I suppose that was the time when the other papers accused him of abominable cruelties. I wonder which was right? Perhaps I shall be able to judge, sooner or later, if I watch at the loopholes of his character like a cat watching for a mouse to come out for a walk.

As for money, if one can believe newspapers, he has plenty without shaking pennies from the slot of Ellaline Lethbridge's bank, and was fairly well off even before he came in for his title or his castle. However, as a very young man, he may have been poor — about the time he went into guardianship.

By the way, the left arm seems all right now. Anyhow, he uses it as arms are meant to be used, so far as I can see, so evidently it improved with time.

The papers tell about his coming back to England, and his Warwickshire castle, and the fire, and Mrs. Norton giving up her house in — some county or other; I 've already forgotten which — to live with her "distinguished brother." Also, they say that he has a ward, whose mother was a relative of the family, and whose father was the Honourable Frederic Lethbridge, so well known

and popular in society during the "late eighties." Ellaline was born in 1891. What had become of him, I 'd like to know? Perhaps he died before she was born. She has told me that she can't remember him, but that 's about all she has ever said of her father.

We are to stay at the Ritz until we start off on the motor trip, which is actually going to happen, though I was afraid it was too good to be true. The new car won't be ready for a week, though. I am sorry, but Mrs. Norton is n't. She is afraid she will be killed, and thinks it will be a messy sort of death to die. Besides, she likes London. She says her brother will be "overwhelmed with invitations"; but he hates society, and loathes being lionized. Imagine the man smothered under stacks of perfumed notes, as Tarpeia was under the shields and bracelets! Emily has not lived in London, because she wanted to be in a place where she particularly valued the vicar and the doctor; but she has given them up for her brother now, and is only going to write her symptoms, spiritual and physical. She enjoys church more than anything else, but thinks it will be her duty to take me about a little while we 're in town, as her brother is sure not to, because he spurns women, and is not interested in anything they do.

I suppose she must know; and yet, at lunch yesterday, he asked if we were too tired, or if we should like to "do a few theatres." I said — because I simply *had* to spare them a shock later — that I was afraid I had n't anything nice to wear. I felt myself go red — for it was a sort of disgrace to Ellaline — but he did n't seem as much surprised as Mrs. Norton did. Her eyebrows went up;

but he only said of course school-girls never had smart frocks, and I must buy a few dresses at once.

One evening gown would be enough for a young girl, Mrs. Norton said, but he did n't agree with her. He said he had n't thought about it, but now that it occurred to him, he was of opinion that women should have plenty of nice things. Then, when she told him, rather hurriedly, that she would choose me something ready made at a good shop in Oxford Street, he remarked that he 'd always understood Bond Street was the place.

"Not for school-girls," explained dear Emily, who is a canny person.

"She is n't a school-girl now. That 's finished," said Sir Lionel. And as she thinks him a tin god on wheels, she ceased to argue.

By the by, he has the air of hating to call me by name. He says "Miss Lethbridge," in a curious, stiff kind of way, when he 's absolutely obliged to give me a label; otherwise he compromises with "you," to which he confines himself when possible. It 's rather odd, and can't be an accident. The only reason I can think of is that he may feel it is really his duty to call me "Ellaline."

I promised to write to Ellaline, as soon as I 'd anything to tell worth telling; and I suppose I must do it to-day; yet I dread to, and can't make up my mind to begin. I don't like to praise a person whom she regards as a monster; still, I 've nothing to say against him; and I 'm sure she 'll be cross if I don't run him down. I think I shall state facts baldly. When I get instalments of allowance — intended for Ellaline, of course — I am to send the money to her, except just enough not to be

noticeably penniless. I 'm to address her as Mademoiselle Leonie de Nesville, and send letters to Poste Restante, because, while I 'm known as Miss Lethbridge, it might seem queer if I posted envelopes directed to a person of my own name. It was Ellaline who suggested that, not I. She thought of everything. Though she 's such a child in some ways, she 's marvellous at scheming.

I really can't think yet what I *shall* say to her. It 's worrying me. I feel guilty, somehow, I don't know why.

Mrs. Norton suggested taking me out shopping and sight-seeing this afternoon. Sir Lionel proposed going with us. His sister was astonished, and so was I, especially after what she had said about his not being interested in women's affairs. "Just to make sure that you take my tip about Bond Street," he remarked. "And Bond Street used to amuse me — when I was twenty. I think it will amuse me now — to see how it and I have changed."

So we are going, all three. Rather awful about the gray serge and sailor hat, is n't it? I felt self-respecting in them at Versailles, and even in Paris, because there I was a singing teacher; in other words, nobody. But in London I 'm supposed to be an heiress. And here, at the Ritz, such beautiful beings come to lunch, in dresses which they have evidently been poured into with consummate skill and incredible expense.

I tasted *Pêche Melba* to-day, for the first time. It made me wish for you. But it did n't seem to go at all with gray serge and a cotton blouse. I ought to have been a Gorgeous Being, with silk linings.

How am I to support the shopping ordeal? Supposing Mrs. Norton chooses me things (oh horror!). They 're

sure to be hideous, but they may be costly. As it says in an English society paper which Madame de Maluet takes: "What should A. do?"

If only Telepathy were a going concern, you would answer that Hard Case for

Your poor, puzzled

"A.," ALIAS "E."

P. S. Nothing more heard or seen of the White Girl's Burden, Richard of that ilk. I was afraid of his turning up at the Grand Hotel in Paris, or even at the station to "see us off," but he did n't. He has disappeared into space, and is welcome to the whole of it. I should nearly have forgotten him, if I did n't wonder sometimes what his mysterious profession is.

VI

SIR LIONEL PENDRAGON TO COLONEL P. R. O'HAGAN, AT DROITA, EAST BENGAL

Ritz Hotel, London, July 8th

My Dear Pat: You were right, I was wrong. It *is* good to be in England again. Your prophecy has come true. The dead past has pretty well buried its dead. A few dry bones show under the surface here and there. I let them lie. Is thy servant a dog, that he should dig up buried bones!

As you know, I was ass enough to dread arriving in Paris. I dreaded it throughout the whole voyage. When I got to Marseilles, I found a wire from Emily, saying she would meet me in Paris. Ass again! I had an idea she was putting herself to that trouble with the kindly wish to "stand by," and take my thoughts off old days. But I might have known better, knowing that good, practical little soul. She had quite another object. Came to break the news of a fire at Graylees; but it seems not to have done any serious damage, except to have wiped out a few modern frills. They can easily be tacked on again. I 'm glad it was no worse, for I love Graylees. I might have turned out a less decent sort of chap than I am if it had n't been for the prospect of inheriting it sooner or later. One has to live up to certain things, and Graylees was an incentive.

You asked me to tell you if Emily had changed. Well, she has. It 's eighteen years since you saw her; fifteen since I did. I must tell you honestly, you 'd have no sentimental regrets if you could see her now. You will remember, if you 're not too gallant, that she was three years older than you; the three seem to have stretched to a dozen. Luckily, you did n't let Norton's snatching Emily from under your nose prey upon cheek or heart. Nothing is damaged. You are sound and whole, and that is why your friendship has been such a boon to me. You have saved me from tilting against many windmills.

I suppose you 'll think I 'm "preambling" now, to put off the evil moment of telling you about Ellaline de Nesville's girl. But no. For once you 're mistaken in me. After all, it is n't an evil moment. I 'm surprised at myself, doubly surprised at the girl; and both surprises are agreeable ones.

I don't ask you if you remember Ellaline; for nobody who ever saw her could forget her; atleast, so it seems to me, after all the years, and all the changes in myself. As I am now, hers is the last type with which I should fall in love, provided I were fool enough to lose my head for anyone. Yet I can't wonder at the adoration I gave her. She was exactly the sort of girl to call out a boy's love, and she had all mine, poor foolish wretch that I was. There 's nothing more pathetic, I think, at this distance, than a boy's passionate purity in his first love — unless it 's his disillusionment; for disillusion does no nature good. It would have done mine great harm if I had n't had a friend like you to groan and grumble to.

You understand how I 've always felt about this child

she wished me to care for. I was certain that Ellaline Number 2 would grow up as like Ellaline Number 1 as this summer's rose is like last summer's, which bloomed on the same bush.

At four years old the little thing undoubtedly had a dollish resemblance to her mother. I thought I remembered that she had the first Ellaline's great dark eyes, full of incipient coquetry, and curly black lashes, which the little flirt already knew how to use, by instinct. The same sort of mouth, too, which to look at makes a boy believe in a personal Cupid, and a man in a personal devil. I had a dim recollection of chestnut-brown hair, falling around a tiny face shaped like Ellaline's; "heart-shape" we used to call it, Emily and I, when we were both under our little French cousin's thumb, in the oldest days of all, before even Emily began to find her out.

I wonder if a child sheds its first hair, like its first teeth? I 've never given much thought to infantine phenomena of any kind; still, I 'm inclined to believe now that there must be such cases. Of course, we know a type of blonde, née brunette; for instance, Mrs. Senter, young Burden's fascinating aunt, whom we suspected of having turned blond in a single night (by the way, whom should I run across in Paris but Dicky, grown up more or less since he chaperoned his female belongings in the Far East). But I 'm not talking of the Mrs. Senters of the world; I 'm talking of Ellaline's unexpected daughter. She has changed almost incredibly between the ages of four and nineteen.

Before I knew Emily intended meeting me in Paris, I wrote the school-ma'am asking that my ward might be sent,

well chaperoned, to the Gare de Lyon. It was bad enough to have to face a modern young female, adorned with all the latest improvements and parlour tricks. It would have been worse to face several dozens of these creatures in their lair; therefore, I funked collecting my ward at Versailles. I was to know her by a rose pinned on her frock in case she 'd altered past recognition. It was well, as things turned out, that I 'd made the suggestion, otherwise the girl would have had to go back to Versailles, like an unclaimed parcel; and that would have been bad, as she had no chaperon. Something had happened to the lady, or to the lady's relatives. I almost forget what, now.

Instead of the dainty little Tanagra figure in smart French frills, which I expected, there was a tall, beautiful young person, with the bearing of an Atalanta, and the clothes of a Quakeress. She tacked my name on to the wrong man, or I should have let her go, in spite of the rose, so different was she from what I expected. And you 'll be amused to hear that her idea of Lionel Pendragon was embodied by old "Hannibal" Jones, who got into my train at Marseilles. He 's taken to parting his name in the middle now, and is General Wellington-Jones. She ought to have known my age approximately, or could have learned it if she cared to bother; but I suppose to nineteen, forty might as well be sixty. That 's a thing to remember, if one feels the sap pulsing in one's branches, just to remind one that after all it 's not spring, but autumn. And at the present moment, by the way, I 'm not sure that I shan't need this kind of taking down a peg, for I am feeling so young that I think I must be growing old. I have begun to value what 's left me of youth; to take it out

and look at it in all lights, like a fruit which must be gloated over before it decays — and that 's a fatal sign, eh? I have the most extraordinary interest in life, which I attribute to the new motor-car which will be finished and ready to use in a few days; also to the thought that Graylees is my own.

But I 'm wandering away from the girl.

She is as unlike Ellaline de Nesville as one beautifully bound first volume of a human document can be from another equally attractive. "First volume of a human document" is n't inexpressive of a young girl, is it? Heaven knows what this one may be by the time the second and third volumes are ready for publication; but at present one turns over the leaves with pleased surprise. There 's something original and charming in each new page.

Her first hair must have been shed, for the present lot — and there is a lot! — is of a bright, yellowy brown; looks like a child's hair, somehow. There are little rings and kinks about it which I take to have been put there by the curling-tongs of nature, though I may be mistaken. And I suppose I must have deceived myself about the child's eyes, for they are not black, but of a grayish hazel, which can look brown or violet at night. She is a tall young thing, slim and straight as a sapling, with frank, honest manners, which are singularly engaging. I look at her in amazement and interest, and find her looking at me with an expression which I am not able to make out. I hardly dare let myself go in liking her, for fear of disappointment. She seems too good to be true, too good to last. I keep wondering what ancestress of Ellaline de Nesville's, or Fred Lethbridge's, is gazing out of those

azure windows which are this girl's eyes. If Fred's soul, or Ellaline's, peeps from behind the clear, bright panes, it contrives to keep itself well hidden — so far. But I expect anything.

I had no notion until now that a young woman could be a delightful "pal" for a man, especially a man of my age. Perhaps this is my ignorance of the sex (for I admit I locked up the book of Woman, and never opened it again, since the chapter of Ellaline), or it may be that girls have changed since the "brave days when we were twenty-one." At that remote epoch, as far as I can discover by blowing off the dust from faded souvenirs, one either made love to girls, or one did n't. They were there to dance with and flirt with, and go on the river with, not to talk politics to, or exchange opinions of the universe. They — the prettiest ones — would have thought that valuable time was being wasted in such discussions. Yet here is this girl, not twenty, a child fresh from school — a French school, at that — radiant with the power of her youth, her beauty, her femininity; yet she seems actually interested in problems of life unconnected with love affairs. She appears to like talking sense, and she has humour, far more subtle than the mere, kittenish sense of fun which belongs to her years — or lack of them. I dreaded the responsibility of her, but I dreaded much more being bored by her, flirted with by her. I 'm hanged if I could have stood that from the kind of girl I was prepared to see; but as I said, I 've found a "pal" — if I dared believe in her. Instead of avoiding my ward's society, and shoving it on to Emily, as I intended, I excuse myself to myself for contriving pretexts to bask in it.

To-day, for instance, what do you think I did? A shopping expedition was in question. Emily, who never had much taste in dress, and now clothes herself as if in punishment for sin, seems to know when other women are badly turned out. She thinks it right that young girls should be simply dressed, but considers that in the case of Ellaline simplicity has been carried too far. You see, she does n't know what you and I know about that wretched fellow Lethbridge's end, and she believes his daughter has plenty of money, or will have, on coming of age. Naturally, I don't undeceive her. Emily is a good soul, but over-conscientious in questions of money, and if she knew the truth she might be inclined to hold the purse-strings tight. She might even be tempted to hint something distressing to this poor girl, if the child vexed her by any thoughtless little extravagance; whereas I would n't for a good deal have Ellaline's daughter guess she owes anything to me.

Emily offered to choose frocks for Miss Lethbridge; whereupon that young lady cast such a comical glance of despair at me — a glance which I think was involuntary — that it was all I could do not to burst out laughing. I saw so well what was in her mind! And if you will believe me, O'Hagan, I volunteered to go with them.

Having committed myself, I had all the sensations of a fly caught on a sheet of "Tanglefoot," or a prisoner of war chained to a Roman chariot; but in the end I enjoyed myself hugely. Nothing better has happened to me since I used to be taken to look at the toyshops the day before Christmas. No, not even my first pantomime could beat this as an experience!

Emily's economical soul clamoured for Oxford Street. I stood out for Bond, and got my way. (You will grin here. You say I always do get my way.) My idea was to make of myself a kind of Last Resort, or Court of Appeal. I meant to let Emily advise, but to sweep her aside if she perpetrated atrocities. The first shop, however, went to my head. It was one of those where you walk into a kind of drawing-room with figurines, or whatever you call them — slender, headless ladies in model dresses — grouped about, and other equally slender, but long-headed ladies in black satin trains, showing off their dummy sisters.

It was the figurines that intoxicated me. I saw Ellaline's head — in imagination — coming out at the top of all the prettiest dresses. They were wonderfully simple, too, the most attractive ones; seemed just the thing for a young girl. Emily walked past them as if they were vulgar acquaintances trying to catch her eye at a duchess's ball, but they trapped me. There was a white thing for the street, that looked as if it had been made for Ellaline, and a blue fluff, cut low in the neck, exactly the right colour to show up her hair. Then there was a film of pink, with wreaths of little rosebuds dotted about — made me think of spring. (I told you I 'd lost my head, did n't I?)

I stopped my ward, pointed out these things to her, and asked her if she liked them. She said she did, but they would be horribly expensive. She would n't think of buying such dreams. With that, up swam one of the satin ladies (whose back view was precisely like that of a wet, black codfish with a long tail; I believe she was "Directoire"); and hovering near on a sea of pale-green carpet

she volunteered the information that these "little frocks" were "poems," singularly suited to the style of — I expected her to say my "daughter." Instead of which, however, she finished her sentence with a "madam" that brought a blush to my weather-beaten face. I was the only one concerned who did blush, however, I assure you! The girl smiled into my eyes, with a mischievous twinkle, and minded not at all. A former generation would have simpered, but this young person has n't a simper in her.

I said "Nonsense," she could well afford the dresses. She argued, and Emily returned to help her form up a hollow square. They were both against me, but I insisted, and the codfish was a powerful ally.

"Would they fit you?" I asked the girl.

"Yes, they would fit me, I dare say. But ——"

That settled it.

"We 'll take them," said I. And after that, being beside myself, I reconnoitred the place, pointing my stick at other things which took my fancy. The codfish backed me up at every step, and other codfishes swam the green sea, with hats doubtless brought from unseen coral caves. Most of them were enormous hats, but remarkably attractive, in one way or another, with large drooping brims that dripped roses or frothed with ostrich plumes. I made Ellaline take off a small, round butter plate she had on, which was ugly in itself, though somehow it looked like a saint's halo on her; and murmuring compliments on "madam's" hair, the siren codfishes tried on one hat after another. I bought all, without asking the prices, because each one was more becoming to the girl than its

predecessor, and not to have all, would have been like deliberately destroying so many original Gainsboroughs or Sir Joshuas.

The child's hair, by the way, is extraordinarily vital. It spouts up in two thick, bright billows over her white forehead, like the beginning of a strong fountain — a very agreeable foundation for a hat.

Seeing that I had gone mad, the wily codfishes took advantage of my state, and flourished things before my eyes, at which Emily instantly forbade me to look. It is true that they were objects not often seen by bachelor man, except in shop windows and on the advertising pages of women's magazines; but silk petticoats and cobwebby lace frills have no Gorgon qualities, and I was not turned to stone by the sight of them. I even found courage to ask of the company at large if they were the sort of thing that young ladies ought to have in their wardrobes. The answer was emphatically in the affirmative.

"Have you already got all you want of them, or could you make use of more?" I inquired of my ward.

"I should n't know myself in such miracles," said she, with a kind of gasp, her eyes very bright, and her cheeks pinker than they had been when she was suspected of bridehood. She was still suspected of it; indeed, I think that in the minds of the black satin codfishes circumstantial evidence had tinkered suspicion into certainty. But Ellaline was deaf to the "madam." They might have turned her from wife into widow without her noticing. She was burning with the desire to possess those embroidered cobwebs and those frilled petticoats. I don't know why she should have been more excited about garments

which few, if any, save herself, would see after she 'd put them on, than she was about those on which cats and kings might gaze; but so it was. I should like to ask an expert if this is the case with all females, or if it is exceptional.

"Send the lot with the hats and dresses," said I. And when she widened her eyes and gasped, I assured her that I knew her income better than she did. Anything she cared to have in the way of pretty clothes she could afford.

Strange to say, even then she did n't seem comfortable. She opened her lips as if to speak; shut them hastily at the first word, swallowed it with difficulty, sighed, and looked anxious. I should rather have liked to know what was in her mind.

We ended up by the purchase of costumes suitable to the automobile, both for Emily and Ellaline. I think women ought to be as "well found" for motoring, as for yachting, don't you? And I am looking forward to the trip I intend to take. It will be interesting to study the impressions made upon this young girl by England, land of history and beauty —

> . . . this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea —
> . . . this England.

You will laugh at me, perhaps, for my long "harping" on my ward; but anyhow, don't misunderstand. It 's not because she is pretty and engaging (one would say that of a kitten), but because of the startling contrast between the real girl and the girl of my imagination. I can't help thinking about her a good deal for this reason, and what

I think of I have generally talked of or written of fully to you, my best and oldest friend. It 's a habit nearly a quarter of a century old, and I don't mean to break it now, particularly as you have made rather a point of my continuing it on my return "home" after all these years.

London has got hold of me. I am fascinated by it. Either it has improved as it has grown, or I am in a mood to be pleased with anything English. Do you remember dear old Ennis's Rooms, which you and I used to think the height of luxury and gaiety? I 've promised myself to go there again, and I mean to take Ellaline and Emily to supper after the theatre to-night. I think I shall keep this letter open to tell you how the old place impresses me.

Midnight and a half.

I 've had a shock. Ennis's is dead as a doornail. We entered, after the theatre, and galvanized the Rooms into a kind of dreadful life. They "don't serve many suppers now, sir," it seems. "It 's mostly luncheons and dinners."

The waiters resented us as intruders. We were the only ones, too, which made it worse, as all their rancour was visited on us; but we had n't been for many minutes at our old favourite table (the one thing unchanged), trying to keep up a spurious gaiety, when another party of two ventured in.

They were young Dick Burden and his aunt, Mrs. Senter.

Now, you may n't see it, but this was rather odd. It would n't have been odd in the past, to meet your most intimate friend from round the corner, and the Shah of Persia, at Ennis's. But evidently the " people who amuse

themselves" don't come now. It 's not "the thing." Why, therefore, should this couple choose Ennis's for supper? *They* have n't been out of England for fifteen years, like me. If Mrs. Senter occasionally spends Saturday to Monday in India, or visits the Sphinx when the Sphinx is in season, she always returns to London when "everybody is in town," and there does as everybody does.

I immediately suspected that Burden had brought her with an object: that object, to gain an introduction to Ellaline. The suspicion may seem far-fetched; but you would n't pronounce it so if you could have seen the young man's face, in the railway station at Paris, the other day. I had that privilege; and I observed at the time his wish to know my ward, without feeling a responsive one to gratify it. I don't know why I did n't feel it, but I did n't, though the desire was both pardonable and natural in the young fellow. He has a determined jaw; therefore perhaps it 's equally natural that, when disappointed, he should persist — even follow, and adopt strong measures (in other words, an aunt) to obtain his object. You see, Ellaline is an extremely pretty girl, and I 'm not alone in thinking so.

My idea is that, having found us in the newspapers, staying at the Ritz, the boy must have somehow informed himself as to our movements, awaiting his opportunity — or his aunt. I bought my theatre tickets in the hotel. He may have got his information from there; and the rest was easy — as far as Ennis's. I 'm afraid the rest was, too, because Mrs. Senter selected the table nearest ours, and after we had exchanged greetings proposed that we

join parties. The tables were placed together, and introductions all round were a matter of course. Young England expects that every aunt will do her duty!

They still give you very good food at Ennis's, but it 's rather like eating "funeral baked meats."

Mrs. Senter is exactly what she was some years ago. Perhaps it would be ungallant to recall to your memory just *how* many years ago. She is, if anything, younger. I believe there 's a maxim, "Once a duchess, always a duchess." I think women of to-day have another: "Once thirty, always thirty"; or, "Once thirty, always twenty-nine." But, joking apart, she is a very agreeable and rather witty woman, sympathetic too, apparently, though I believe you used to think, when she was out smiting hearts at our Back o' Beyond, that in nature she somewhat resembled a certain animal worshipped by the Egyptians and feared by mice. She seems very fond of her nephew Dick, with whom she says she goes about a good deal. "We chaperon each other," she expressed it. She pities me for my fire at Graylees, but envies me my motoring trip.

We shall be off in a few days, now, I hope, as soon as Ellaline has been shown a few "features" of London. I went to see the car to-day, and she is a beauty. I shall try her for the first time to-morrow.

Ever Yours,

PEN.

VII

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Ritz Hotel, London, July 9th

One and Only Compleat Mother: Things have happened. I felt them coming in my bones — *not* my funny bones this time. For the things may turn out to be not at all funny.

Mr. Richard Burden has been introduced to the alleged Miss Lethbridge. I wonder if he *can* know she is merely "the alleged"? He is certainly changed, somehow, both in his manner, and in his *way of looking at one.* I thought in Paris he had n't at all a bad face, though rather impudent — and besides, even Man is a fellow being! But last night, for a minute, he really had an incredibly wicked expression; or else he was suppressing a sneeze. I could n't be quite sure which — as you said about Aubrey Beardsley's weird black-and-white women.

It was at a restaurant — a piteous restaurant, where the waiters looked like enchanted waiters in the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty. He — Mr. Dicky Burden — came in, with an aunt. Such an aunt! I could never be at home with her as an aunt if I were a grown-up man, though she might make a bewitching cousin. She 's quite beautiful, dear, and graceful; but I don't like her at all. I think Sir Lionel does, though. They knew

each other in Bengal, and she kept saying to him in a cooing voice, "*Do* you remember?"

You can see she 's too clever to be *always* clever, because that bores people; but she says witty, sharp things which sound as if they came out of plays, or books, and you think back to see whether she deliberately led up to them. For instance, she asked Sir Lionel, apropos of woman's suffrage, whether, on the whole, he preferred a man's woman, or a woman's woman?

"What 's the difference?" he wanted to know.

"All the difference between a Gibson girl and an Ibsen girl," said she. I wonder if she 'd heard that, or made it up? Anyhow, when Sir Lionel threw back his head and laughed, in an attractive way he has, which shows a dent in his chin, I wished *I 'd* said it. But the more she flashed out bright things, the more of a lump I was. I do think the one unpardonable sin is dulness, and I felt guilty of it. She simply vampired me. Sucked my wits dry. And, do you know, I 'm afraid she 's going on the motor trip with us?

Sir Lionel does n't dream of such a thing, but she does. And she 's the sort of person whose dreams, if they 're about *men*, come true. Of course, I don't know her well enough to hate her, but I feel it coming on.

In books, all villainesses who 're worth their salt have little, sharp teeth and pointed nails. Mrs. Senter's teeth and nails are just like other women's, only better. Book villainesses' hair is either red or blue-black. Hers is pale gold, though her eyes are brown, and very soft when they turn toward Sir Lionel. Nevertheless, though I 'm *not* cattish, except when absolutely necessary, I know she 's

a *pig*, never happy unless she has the centre of the stage, whether it 's *her* part or not — wanting everyone to feel the curtain rises when she comes on, and falls when she goes off. She looks twenty-eight, so I suppose she 's thirty-five; but really she 's most graceful. Standing up for Sir Lionel to take off her cloak, her trailing gray satin dress twisted about her feet, as some charming, slender trees stand with their bark spreading out round them on the ground, and folding in lovely lines like drapery.

She managed to draw Mrs. Norton into conversation with her and Sir Lionel, and to let Dick talk to me, so they must have arranged beforehand what they would do. At first, when he had got his wish and been introduced, he spoke of ordinary things, but presently he asked if I remembered his saying that he wished to go into a certain profession. I answered "Yes," before I stopped to think, which I 'm afraid flattered him, and then he wanted me to guess what the profession was. When I would n't, he said it was that of a detective. "If I succeed, my mother will give up her objections," he explained. "And I think I shall succeed." It was when he said this, that he looked so wicked — or else as if he wanted to sneeze — as I told you. What can he mean? And what has he found out? Or is it only my bad conscience? Oh, dear, I should like to give it a thorough spring cleaning, as one does in Lent! I 'm afraid that 's what is needed. I 've had plenty of blacks on it since Ellaline made me consent to her plan, and I began to carry it out. But now I have more. I have lots of dresses and hats on it, too — lovely ones. And petticoats, and such things, etc., etc. Did Dragons of old insist on their fairy princess-

prisoners having exquisite clothes, and say "hang the expense"? *This* Dragon has done so with his Princess, and I had to take the things, because, you see, I have engaged to play the part, and this apparently is his rich conception of it. He says that I — Ellaline — can afford to have everything that 's nice; so what *can* I do? The worst of it is, much of my new finery is so delicate, it will be *défraiche* by the time the real Ellaline can have it, even if it would fit or suit her, which it won't. But probably the man was ashamed to be seen with a ward in gray serge and a sailor hat, so I could n't very well violate his feelings. Perhaps if I 'd refused to do what he wanted, all his hidden Dragon-ness would have rushed to the surface; but as I was quite meek, he behaved more like an angel than a dragon.

It really was fun buying the things, in a fascinating shop where the assistants were all more refined than duchesses, and so slender-waisted they seemed to be held together only by their spines and a ladylike ligament or two. But if Providence did n't wish women to lace, why were n't our ribs made to go all the way down? The way we were created, it 's an *incentive* to pinch waists. It seems *meant*, does n't it?

I was a dream to look at when we went to supper at that restaurant; which was *one* comfort. Mrs. Senter's things were no nicer than mine, and she was so interested in what I wore. Only she was a good deal more interested in Sir Lionel.

"Everywhere I go, people are talking of you," she said. "You have given them exciting things to talk about."

"Really, I was n't aware of it," returned the poor

Dragon, as apologetically as if she 'd waked him up to say he 'd been snoring.

Since I wrote you, I 've heard more things about his past from Mrs. Norton, who is as proud of her brother, after a fashion, as a cat of its mouse, and always wanting to show him off, in just the same way. (We all have our "mouse," have n't we? I 'm yours. Just now, the new hats are mine.) She has told me a splendid story about a thing he did in Bengal: saved twelve people's lives in a house that was on fire in the middle of the night — the kind of house which blazes like a haystack. And, according to her, he thinks no more of rescuing drowning persons who jump off ships in seas swarming with sharks than we think of fishing a fly out of our bath. Now, *is* it possible for a man like that to be treacherous to women, and to accept bribes for being guardian to their children? I do wish I knew what to make of it all — and of him.

He has taken the funny little Bengalese valet, who has been, and is to be, his chauffeur, to try the new car this morning. He meant to have gone before this to look at his partly burnt castle in Warwickshire, but he says London has captivated him, and he can't tear himself away; that he will go in a day or two, when he has trotted Mrs. Norton and me about to see a few more sights. Of course, we could quite well see the sights by ourselves. Mrs. Norton has seen them all, anyhow, and only revisits them for my sake; while as for me, you and I "did" London thrillingly together in the last two months of our glory. But Sir Lionel has an interesting way of telling things, and he is as enthusiastic as a boy over his England. Not that he gushes; but one knows, somehow, what he is

feeling. I can't imagine his ever being tired, ut he is very considerate of us — seems to think women are frail as glass. I suppose women *are* a sex by themselves, but we are n't as different as all that.

Once in a while he threw a sideways glare at Dick Burden, when D. B. was talking with a confidential air to me. I know from Ellaline and Mrs. Norton that Sir Lionel dislikes women; but all the same I believe he thinks we ought to be kept indoors unless veiled, and never allowed to talk to men, except our relatives.

Mrs. Norton is *so* funny, without knowing it. She asked her brother as gravely as possible at breakfast this morning: "Had you a harem in Bengal, dear?"

"Good heavens, no!" he answered, turning red. "What put such a ghastly idea into your head?"

"Oh, I only thought perhaps it was the thing, and you were obliged to, or be talked about," she explained, calmly.

He went on to tell her that it was not at all necessary to have harems, and she was quite surprised. You would think that she 'd have taken pains to find out every detail of her brother's life in a country where he was one of the head men, would n't you? But she hardly feels that any country except her own is worth serious inquiries. She has the impression that "heathen" are all alike, and mostly naked, but not as embarrassing to meet as if they were white.

Good-bye, dearest. I 'm afraid I write very disconnected letters. But I feel "disconnected" myself, somehow, like a telephone that 's been "cut off."

Your loving and well-dressed

DECEIVER.

P. S. It 's to-morrow, for I forgot to post this, there were so many things " doing." Please forgive me. The car 's splendid, and I am to christen her. We 're going to have a kind of ceremony like a launching, and I have to think of a name for her, and throw wine on her bonnet. Sir Lionel is longing to get off on the tour, he says; and as he 's to leave town for Warwickshire to-morrow, turning me over temporarily to the tender mercies of the good—(his sister)—I almost hope that after all Mrs. Senter may n't have time to "sweedle" him into taking her with us, as I *know* she hopes to do.

We, by the way, are not to see his place until the burnt bit is mended. We 're to avoid Warwickshire in starting out, go away up North as far as the Roman Wall, visit Bamborough Castle, where he thinks friends of his, who own it, will actually invite us to lunch, or something (it seems like a dream), and then stop in Warwickshire at the end of the tour, when all the dilapidations have been made good. The Dragon naturally expects me, not only to finish the trip, but to take up my residence at Graylees until next spring, when his plan is that his ward shall be presented. Oh, mice and men, and dragons, how aft your plans gang agley! Of course, mine depend altogether upon Ellaline. I hold myself ready for marching orders from her. But I must confess to you that, whether right or wrong, I don't look forward to the weeks of my duties as understudy with the same feelings I had when I was engaged to perform them.

Little did Sir Lionel guess what was in my mind this morning, when I asked if one could see most of England

in a few weeks when motoring! But I may have to take my flight from the car, so to speak, unless Ellaline be detained for some reason. I 'm expecting a letter from her any day now, and there may be definite news.

Good-bye, again, dearest.

VIII

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Royal Hotel, Chichester,
July 17th

Brightest and Best: *La Donna é automobile. I* am "la donna"; and the most inward Me-ness of my Me *é automobile.*

Some people — Mrs. Norton, for instance — might say: "What on earth does the silly thing mean?" But you always know what I mean. You and I were born knowing quite a lot of nice little things like that, were n't we? Things we picked up during our various incarnations; things *new* souls have n't had time to collect, poor dears.

My automobiliness is the reason I 've only sent you snippy "how-do-you-do and good-bye" notes, interspersed with telegrams, for the last few days, just thanking you for wise advice, and saying "Glad-you 're-well; so-am-I."

You will guess from my very handwriting that I 'm feeling more at home in life than I did when I wrote you last. And I can't help being pleased that Ellaline's adored one won't be able to leave his manœuvres, to make her his own, till a fortnight or so later than she expected. That is, I can't help being glad, as the doctor thinks you ought to stop at Champel-les-Bains till after the first week

of September, and we *could n't* be together, even if I were back in Paris. You swear you did n't hypnotize him to say that? I would enjoy more peace of mind, while careering through England in Apollo, if I were certain.

Oh, that reminds me, I forgot to tell you what fun it was christening Apollo. I quite enjoyed it, and felt immensely important. Don't you think "Apollo" an appropriate name for such a magnificent car as I 've described to you? The Sun God — Driver of the Chariot of the Sun? Sir Lionel likes it; but he says he is n't sure "The Cloud" would n't be a more appropriate name, because the car costs such a lot that "she" has a silver lining. I began by calling her "it," but he won't let me do that. He does n't much mind my being amateurish, but he hates me to be disrespectful.

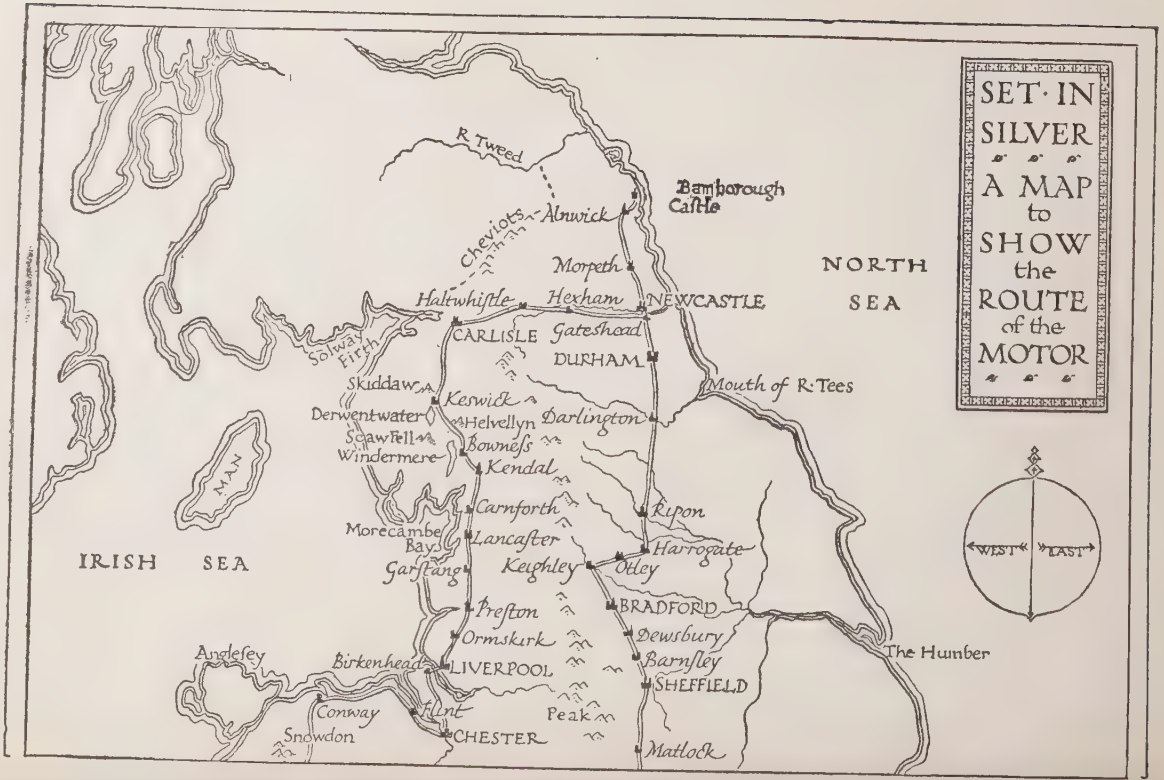
I am so dazzled by the motor and enchanted with the sport of motoring — as well as seeing things even more lovely than I hoped for — that I 'm not worrying over Dick Burden and his mysterious hints about himself as a detective. Besides, when he and his aunt came to tea (you 'll remember I told you in a scrap of a note that it was the day Sir Lionel went to Warwickshire, and how vexed Mrs. Senter was to find him gone), Mr. Dick made himself quite pleasant. He was n't impertinent, or too admiring, or anything which a well-brought-up young Englishman ought not to be. Indeed, I thought by his manner that he wanted tacitly to apologize for his bad behaviour when we first met; so probably, when I fancied he looked wicked that night at Ennis's Rooms, it *was* because he wanted to sneeze. You have taught me to give everybody, except young men, the benefit of the doubt;

but I don't see why one should n't give it to young men, too. I think they 're rather easier to forgive, somehow, than women. Is that why they 're dangerous? But D. B. could never be dangerous to me, in the sense of falling in love.

His aunt certainly wishes to throw us together; I suppose on account of Ellaline's money. She does n't like girls, I 'm sure, but would always be ready, on principle, to give first aid to heiresses. It is something to be thankful for that she has n't grafted herself on to our party, as I feared she might; and though they 're both going to stop at some country house near Southsea, and they "hope we may meet," I dare say I shan't be bothered by them again while I 'm in England. I don't intend to worry. *La donna é automobile!*

I have n't properly described our start, or told you about the things I 've seen *en route*, and I promised to tell you everything; so I 'll go back to the beginning of the trip.

There was Apollo, throbbing with joy of life in front of the hotel door, at nine o'clock of a perfect English morning. There were statuesque, Ritzy footmen, gazing admiringly at the big golden-yellow car (that was one of the reasons I thought she should be named after the Sun God, she is so golden). There was Charu Chunder Bose, alias Young Nick, who would think it a sin against all his gods to dress as a chauffeur, and who continues to garb himself as a self-respecting Bengali — Young Nick, with his sleepy eyes, and his Buddha-when-young smile, about as appropriate on a motor-car as a baby crocodile. There was


SET·IN
SILVER
A MAP
to
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of the
MOTOR
R. Tweed
Bamborough Castle
Alnwick
Cheviots
Morpeth
NORTH
SEA
Haltwhistle
Hexham
NEWCASTLE
Solway Firth
CARLISLE
Gateshead
DURHAM
Skiddaw
Keswick
Mouth of R. Tees
Derwentwater
Helvellyn
Darlington
Scawfell
Windermere
Bownes
Kendal
MAN
Carnforth
Ripon
Morecambe Bay
Lancaster
Harrogate
IRISH
SEA
Garstang
Keighley
Otley
Preston
BRADFORD
Dewsbury
Ormskirk
Anglesey
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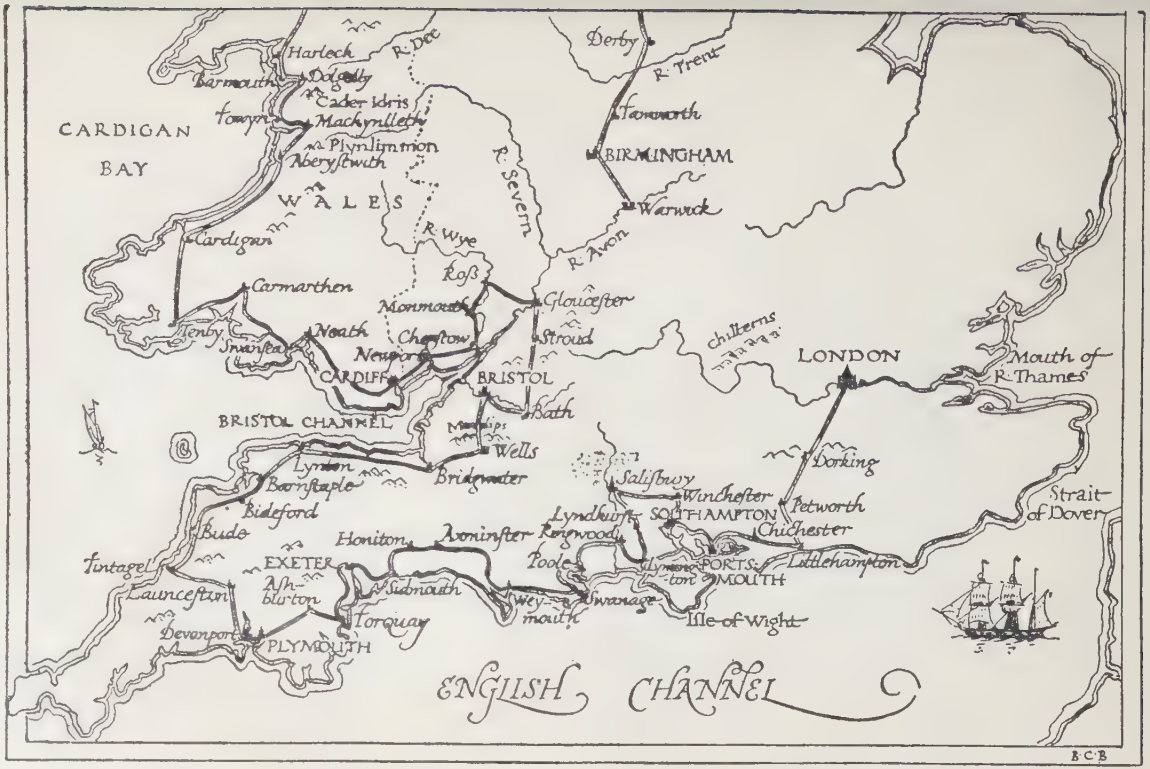
Harlech
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CARDIGAN
BAY
Plynlimmon
Aberystwith
BIRMINGHAM
WALES
R. Severn
Warwick
R. Wye
R. Avon
Cardigan
Ross
Carmarthen
Monmouth
Gloucester
Tenby
Neath
Chepstow
Stroud
Swansea
Newport
Chilterns
LONDON
Mouth of R. Thames
CARDIFF
BRISTOL
Bath
BRISTOL CHANNEL
Mendips
Wells
Dorking
Lynton
Barnstaple
Bridgwater
Salisbury
Winchester
Petworth
Strait of Dover
Bideford
Lyndhurst
SOUTHAMPTON
Chichester
Bude
Honiton
Axminster
Ringwood
Tintagel
EXETER
Poole
PORTS-mouth
Littlehampton
Launceston
Ashburton
Sidmouth
Weymouth
Swanage
Isle of Wight
Torquay
Devonport
PLYMOUTH
ENGLISH CHANNEL
B.C.B

Sir Lionel waiting to tuck us in. There were we two females in neat gray motor dust-cloaks, on which the Dragon insisted; Mrs. Norton in a toque, which she wore as if it were a remote and dreaded contingency; your Audrie in a duck of an early Victorian bonnet, in which she liked herself better than in anything else she ever had on before. There, too, was our luggage, made to fit the car, and looking like the very last word of up-to-dateness — if you know what that look is.

Of course, it was n't the first time I 'd been out in the car, for I think I told you, the day Apollo was christened I had a spin; but it rained, and we went only through the Park. That was nothing. This morning we were bidding good-bye to London, and our pulses were beating high for the Tour. Young Nick drove on the christening day, but this time Sir Lionel took the driver's seat, with the brown idol beside him; and I saw instantly, by the very way he laid his hand on the steering-wheel, with a kind of caress — as a horse-lover pats a beloved mare's neck — that he and the golden car were in perfect sympathy.

We were starting early, because Sir Lionel had planned a good many things for us to see before dark; but early as it was, Piccadilly and Knightsbridge were seething with traffic. Motor buses like mad hippopotamuses; taxi-cabs like fierce young lions; huge carts like elephants; and other vehicles of all sorts to make up a confused medley of wild animals escaped from the Zoo. It looked appalling to mingle with, but our own private Dragon drove so skilfully, yet so carefully, that I never bit my heart once. Always the car seemed sentient, steering its way like a long,

thin pike; then when the chance came, flashing ahead, dauntless and sure.

We went by a great domed palace — Harrod's Stores — and then over Putney Bridge, passing Swinburne's house, whose outside is as deceiving as an oyster-shell that hides a pearl; through Epsom, Charles the Second's "Brighton" (which I 've been reading about in a volume [of Pepys Sir Lionel has given me), to Leatherhead, along the Dorking Road, slowing up for a glimpse of Juniper Hall, glowing red as a smouldering bonfire behind a dark latticed screen of splendid Lebanon cedars. I dare say it 's a good deal changed since dear little Fanny Burney's day, for the house looks quite modern; but then neither buildings nor the people who live in them show their age early in England.

Close under Box Hill we glided; and Sir Lionel pointed out a little path leading up on the left to George Meredith's cottage. Just a small house of gray stone it is (for I would get out and walk up part way to see it from far off, not to intrude or spy); and there that great genius shines out, a clear, white light for the world, like a beacon or a star.

Evidently Surrey air suits geniuses. Do you remember reading about Keats, that he wrote a lot of "Endymion" at Burford Bridge? It was only a little after ten o'clock when we passed the quaint-looking hotel there, but already at least a dozen motors were drawn up before it. I wanted to go in and ask if they show the room Lord Nelson used; but we had too many things to see.

Of course, I am always wishing for you, but I began to wish the hardest just as we came into this green, brackeny,

fairyland of Surrey. It 's the kind of country you love best; although I must say it was never planned for motors. Winding through those green tunnels which are the Surrey lanes, I felt as if, in some quaint dream, I were motoring on a tight-rope, expecting another car to want to pass me on the same rope — which naturally it could n't!

It would have been much worse, though, if Young Nick had been driving. That little, smooth brown face of his looks as if its idol-simper hid no human emotions, and I believe if people and animals were perfectly flat, like paper dolls, so that they would do no harm to his car, he would n't mind how many he drove over. Luckily, however, they *are n't* flat, and the only thing earthly he adores, after his master, is his motor; so he is nice and cautious for its sake. But the Dragon thinks of everyone, and says there 's no pleasure for him in motoring if he leaves a trail of distress or even annoyance along the road as he passes. He slows down at corners; he goes carefully round them; he almost walks Apollo in places where creatures of any kind may start out unexpectedly; and he blows our pleasant musical horn as if by instinct, never forgetting, as I 'm sure I should do.

As we twisted and turned through the Surrey lanes, between Dorking and Shere, little children in red cloaks and tams appeared from behind hedges, looking like blowing poppies as they ran. And blue-eyed, gold-brown haired girls in cottage doorways, under hanging bowers of roses, were as decorative as Old Chelsea china girls. The red tiles of their roofs, as I turned back for one more glimpse, would already be half hidden in waves of green,

but would just show up like beds of scarlet geraniums buried in leaves.

Shere was almost too beautiful to be real, with its rows of Elizabethan cottages whose windows twinkled at us with their diamond-shaped, diamond-bright panes, sparkling under their low, thatch-eyebrows, from between black oak beams. The Tudor chimneys were as graceful as the smoke wreaths that lazily spiraled above them, and the whole effect was — was — well, inexpressibly Birket Foster. I used to think he idealized; but then, I 'd never seen anything of England but London, and did n't know how all English trees, cottages, and even clouds, are trained to group themselves to suit artists of different schools.

I kept wishing that you 'd made me study architecture and botany, instead of languages and music. In justice to oneself, one ought, when travelling in England, to have at least a bowing acquaintance with every sort of architecture, and all families of flowers, to say nothing of trees, so that one might exclaim, as snobs do of royalties and celebrities: "Oh, *she* was the great granddaughter of So-and-So." "He married Lady This-and-That." Also, I find I need much more knowledge of literature than I have. This country is divided off into a kind of glorious chessboard, each square being sacred to some immortal author, playwright, or poet. The artists press them close, without overcrowding; and history lies underneath — history for every square inch.

"Twelve coffin deep," I quoted Kipling to myself, as my mind panted along Roman roads, and the Pilgrim's Way.

"Why, was there a cemetery there?" asked Mrs. Norton, looking mildly interested.

She, by the way, does n't much care for ruins. She says they 're so untidy.

You and I travelled till our money threatened to give out in the noble cause of sight-seeing, but I never realized history quite so potently even in Italy as I do in England. Yet that 's not strange, when you think how tiny England is, compared with other countries, and how things have gone on happening there every minute since the Phœnicians found it a snug little island. Its chapters of history have to be packed like sardines, beginning down, down, far deeper than Kipling's "twelve coffins."

One Surrey village telleth another, just to slip through in a motor-car, though none could ever be tiresome in the telling; but if one stopped to hear the real story of each one, how different they would all be! There would be grand chapters of fighting, and mysterious chapters of smuggling — oh, but long ones about smuggling, since most of the manors and half the old cottages have "smugglers' rooms," where the lace and spirits used to be hidden, in their secret journey from Portsmouth to London. It 's difficult to believe in these thrilling chapters now, in the rich, placid county, where the only mystery floats in the veil of blue mist that twists like a gauze scarf around the tree trunks in the woods, and the only black spots are the dark downs in the distance, with the sky pale gold behind them.

You would love motoring, not only for what you do see, but for what you nearly see, and long to see, but can't — just as Dad used to say "Thank God for all the blessings

I 've never had!" Why, every road you don't go down looks fantastically alluring, just twice as alluring as the one you are in. You grudge missing anything, and fear, greedily, that there may be better villages with more history beyond the line of your route. It 's no consolation when Mrs. Norton says, "Well, you can't see everything!" You *want* to see everything. And you wish you had eyes all the way round your head. It would be inconvenient for hair and hats, but you could manage somehow.

We had to go through Petworth, a most feudal-looking old place, reeking of history since the Confessor, and mentioned in the Domesday Book (I do so respect towns or houses mentioned in the Domesday Book!), and if it had been the right day we could have seen Lord Leconsfield's collection of pictures, some of the best in England; but it was the wrong day, so we sailed on out of Surrey into Sussex, and arrived at Bignor.

All I knew about Bignor was that I must expect something amazing there. Sir Lionel asked me not to read about it in the books of which we have a travelling library in the car — one at least for each county we shall visit. He said he "wanted Bignor to be a surprise" for me; and it is odd the way one finds oneself obeying that man! Not that one 's afraid of him, but — well, I don't know why exactly, but one just does it. We did n't stop in the village, though there was the quaintest grocery shop there you can imagine, perfectly mediæval; and in the churchyard yew trees grand enough to make bows for half the archers of England — if there were any in these days. We went on to quite a modern-looking farmhouse, and Sir Lionel

said, "I am going to ask Mrs. Tupper if she will give us a little lunch. If she says 'yes,' it 's sure to be good."

"I don't know any Tuppers, Lionel," objected Mrs. Norton. "Who are they?"

"Relatives of Martin Tupper, if that name recalls anything to your mind," said he.

Mrs. Norton had a vague idea that she had been more or less brought up on extracts from Martin Tupper, and seemed to associate him with Sundays, when, as a child, she had n't been allowed to play. But that did n't explain how Lionel happened to know connections of his in a Sussex farmhouse. Besides, he could n't possibly have seen them for more than fifteen years.

"That is true, and I only saw them once, even then," he admitted. "But Mrs. Tupper had been here for a good many years, engaged in the most delightful work, which you will hear about by and by; and I 'm sure she is here still, and will be for many more years to come, because I don't want to imagine the place without her."

Mrs. Norton said no more, and her brother knocked on the door of the farmhouse, which stood hospitably open. In a minute, a dear old white-haired lady appeared, and instantly her face lighted up.

"Why, if it is n't Mr. Pendragon — I mean Sir Lionel — come back to see us again!" said she.

Sir Lionel grew red with pleasure, at being remembered by her, for apparently he had n't at all expected it. He seems to forget that he is a celebrity, and generally does n't like being reminded of the fact, but he was pleased that Mrs. Tupper had read about him in the papers from time to time, and had never forgotten his face.

She said she would be delighted to provide us with lunch, if we did n't mind a simple one; and then she would have gone on to say something which would have given the "surprise" away, if Sir Lionel had n't stopped her.

We had delicious country things to eat, with real Surrey cream and apple dumplings. They did taste good after the elaborate French cooking in London, by way of contrast! Then, when we had finished, Sir Lionel said, "Now, Mrs. Tupper, can you take us for a stroll round the farm?"

That did n't sound exciting, did it? We walked out, and it seemed a very nice farm, but nothing remarkable. As we wandered toward some sheds, in a field of mangolds, Sir Lionel made us look up at a big hill, and said, "There was a Roman camp there. If you 'd stood where you stand now, on a quiet night in those times, you could have heard the clanking of armour or the soldiers quarrelling over their dice. Here Roman Stane Street ran, and chariots used to stop to bring the latest news from Rome to the owner of the villa."

"Was there a villa?" asked Mrs. Norton, who thinks it polite to ask her brother questions, whether she is interested or not.

"Let 's take a look into this shed," said he, by way of answer. And, there, protected by that rough roof, was a great stretch of splendid mosaic pavement. It was done in circular compartments of ornamentation, and in one was a beautiful head of Ganymede — in another, Winter. Alas, I should n't have known what they were if I had n't been told, but I would have known that they were rare and wonderful.

This was the "surprise." This was the secret of Bignor; but it was n't nearly all. There were lovely broken pillars, and lots more pavements, acres of mosaic, it seemed; for the villa had been large and important, and must have been built by a rich man with cultivated taste. He knew how to make exile endurable, did that Roman gentleman! Standing in his dining-hall, I could imagine him and his fair lady-wife sitting at breakfast, looking out from between white, glittering pillars at the Sussex downs, grander than those of Surrey, reminding me of great, brave shoulders raised to protect England. Now we knew what Mrs. Tupper's " delightful work" was! For forty-nine years she has cleaned the mosaic pavement of the vanished Roman villa, all of which were discovered by the grandfather of the present owner of the farm. Never once has she tired of looking at the mosaics, because, as she explained to us, "one does n't tire of what is beautiful." There speaks true appreciation, does n't it? Only a born lover of the beautiful could have said that so simply.

There was an Italian, a man from Venice, repairing the mosaic. He could hardly speak a word of English, and beamed with a sudden smile when I asked him some question in his native tongue. We talked awhile, and I translated several things he said to Sir Lionel and his sister. I 'm ashamed to confess, dear, that I was pleased to show off my poor little accomplishment, and proud because I knew one thing which our famous man did n't. Was n't that low of me?

"Well, you were n't disappointed in my surprise, I think?" said Sir Lionel,when we were starting away at last.

I just gave him one look. It really was n't necessary to answer.

As we flashed on, through country always exquisite, and over perfect roads, I could think of nothing but Bignor, until suddenly, after passing through a long aisle of great beeches, like an avenue in a private park, a tremendous bulk of stone looming at me made me jump, and cry out, "Oh!"

Sir Lionel turned his head long enough for half a smile. "Arundel Castle," he said.

It 's lucky for me that Mrs. Norton does n't know much about any part of England except her own home, and the homes of her particular friends, or else she would always be explaining things to me, and I should hate that. It would be like having purple hot-house grapes handed out to one impaled on the prongs of a plated silver fork. I should have wanted to slap her, if *she* had told me I was looking at Arundel Castle, but I was grateful to her brother for the information. This was a wickedness in me; but if you knew how I felt, having started out from the Ritz expecting a quiet day's run through one or two of the garden counties of England, to come like this, bang into the midst of Roman villas, and under the shadow of a tenth-century castle-keep, maybe you 'd excuse my morals for being upset.

You can't have centuries roll away, like a mere cloud of dust raised by your motor, and be perfectly normal, can you? I tried to seem calm, because I hate to be gushing and school-girlish (for Ellaline's sake, I *suppose*, as it can't make any difference what her Dragon thinks of

me), but I 'm pretty sure he saw that I was rather "out of myself" over all his surprises.

He stopped the motor, and we sat for a long time gazing up at the towers beyond the green and silver beeches — a pile of battlemented stone, looking like the Middle Ages carved in granite, yet more habitable to-day than ever before.

We had lunched early, and had plenty of time, so we walked through the park, which made me feel that England must be rather big, after all, to have room for thousands of such parks — even much larger ones — and all its great cities — and miles and miles of farms and common land, and mere "country."

When we lived in New York, you and Dad and I, we used to joke about the way we should feel in England if we should ever go to visit Dad's ancestral Devonshire. We used to pretend that, after being accustomed to the vast distances of America, we should be afraid of tumbling off the edge of England; but so far I find that I don't dread that imminent peril. Just now England seems so vast that my only fear is I may n't have time to reach the Roman Wall.

The Duke's midges bit us a good deal, in the park, so we did n't linger, but went back to Apollo, where Young Nick's remarkable appearance had attracted a crowd of boys and girls from Arundel town. They stood in the road gaping at him, with that steady, unblinking stare English children and French grown-ups have, while the brown image sat motionless in the car, as scornfully oblivious of his critics as if he 'd been the idol he looked.

Poor Sir Lionel hates the attention his extraordinary

little chauffeur excites, for, in spite of his long expatriation, he loathes being conspicuous in any way as heartily as other Englishmen do. But (Mrs. Norton has told me) he saved Young Nick from being murdered by someone who was a "family enemy." Since then — it was when Nick was scarcely more than a child — the brown image has worshipped the Dragon, and refused to be separated from him. When Sir Lionel proposed providing for him well, and leaving him behind, Nick made no complaints, but began industriously to starve himself to death. So, of course, he had to be brought to England, and his master just makes the best of him, costume, features, broomstick legs, and all.

We had tea in a picture of Turner's: for Littlehampton, with its tidal river, its harbour and pier, its fishing boats and shining sails, its windmill, its goldy-brown sands, and its banked violet clouds, was a genuine Turner. Of course, he would n't have painted the Beach Hotel, in spite of its nice balconies, but we were glad it was there, and it did n't spoil the picture.

By that time, it was nearly half-past five, but we had hours of daylight before us, so we stopped for a look at Climping Church (don't you love the "ing" that shows a place has kept its Saxon name?) with its splendid Norman doorway and queer, long windows, shaped like open pods of peas beautifully ornamented round their edges. Thank goodness, there was nothing "perp" about it! I get so tired of "perp" things in guide books.

Slinden we glanced at, too, a most idyllic village, garrisoned with the noblest beeches I ever saw. Hilaire Belloc, whose "Path to Rome" we liked so much, stayed

at Slinden, writing delightful things about Sussex. I mean to get and read all I can, because, even in the glimpse I 've had, I can see that Sussex has a character, as well as a charm, individually its own. The Downs give it, and make you feel that a true man of Sussex would be frank, warm-hearted, simple and brave, with old-fashioned ways which, with a pleasant obstinacy, he would be loath to change. I heard Mrs. Tupper quote two or three quaint proverbs which were new to me, but Sir Lionel said they were old, almost, as the Sussex downs, and as racy of the soil. I always associated Brighton with Sussex, which made it seem a sophisticated county: but you see, *true* Sussex — the Downs — stands all independent and sturdy, between the pleasure-places by the sea and the snug Weald.

The faces we passed did n't look like faces descended from smugglers, they seemed so kind and good; but then, of course, smuggling was quite a respectable industry in Sussex, where the secretive formation of the coast clearly showed that Providence had meant it to epict. I love the Sussex downs, I like the Sussex faces, and I admire the Sussex church spires — tall and pointed, covered with lichened shingles.

We stopped at Boxgrove, too, a church adored by architects; and as we went our way to Goodwood the sea was a torn sheet of silver seen behind great downs which the afternoon sun was gilding. Oh, the Lebanon cedars and the views of Goodwood! If I were there for the races, I think not even the finest horses, the most beautiful women, and the prettiest frocks in England could hold my eyes long from that view. I can shut my eyes now — the day

after — and see those Lebanon cedars black against an opal sky. Another picture I can see, too, is Bosham Church, standing up tall and pure as a gray nun singing an *Ave Maria* beside the clear water. It comes back to me from my studies of English history that Vespasian had a villa there, and that Harold sailed from Bosham. Do you know, he 's in the act of doing it on the Bayeux tapestry? Once, the Danes stole the Bosham church bells, and the dear things still ring at the bottom of the sea, because the robber ship was wrecked, and went down with the chime, in mid channel. I like that story. It matches the picture and the tapestry.

Our day stopped at Chichester, and my letter must stop, too, for all this I tell you of was only yesterday. We arrived last evening, and now it 's nearly midnight of the next day. I began to write just after dinner, sitting in my dear old-fashioned room, and if I don't soon say good-night I shan't get much beauty sleep. To-morrow morning, at half-past nine, we 're going on; but before we start I 'll scribble a Chichester postscript. So you see, I must be up bright and early, especially as I mean to fly out for one more glimpse of the cathedral — though I spent most of this afternoon in it.

I wonder if you are sparing a few minutes to-night to dream of .

YOUR AUDRIE?

P. S.— Eight-twenty in the morning, and I 've been up for two hours.

You 'd like Chichester immensely. I don't say "love," for it has n't engaged my affections, somehow; but I do love the beautiful jewel of a market cross, and some of

" The jewel of a market cross "

the tombs in the cathedral. The cross is quite a baby compared with lots of others, it seems, being only just born at the time Henry VIII. was cutting off pretty ladies' heads when he had tired of their hearts. Several tombs are so lovely, you almost want to be dead, and have one as like as possible; but, though part of the cathedral is satisfyingly old (eleventh century), its new spire reminds one of a badly chosen hat, and the whole building somehow looks cold and dull, like a person with a magnificent profile who never says anything illuminating.

As for Chichester itself, except the market cross, the only thing that has touched my heart was St. Mary's Hospital, surely the quaintest old almshouse on earth. The town has rather a self-conceited air to me, and unless one were wise, one might n't realize without being informed that it 's immemorably old. Of course, though, if one *were* wise, one would know the Romans had had a hand in the making or re-making of it, because of the geometric, regular way in which it 's built. Sir Lionel Pendragon told me that. He seems to remember all he ever learned, whereas ever so many little bundles are already knocking about in dusty corners of my brain, with their labels lost.

There could n't be a more thrilling road than the road along which we came to Chichester, and by which we will leave it in a few minutes now. Think of Roman Stane Street, and listen for the rumble of ghostly chariot wheels! Then — if you 've not come this way for Goodwood races — you can throw your mind a little further ahead to the days of the crusaders and the pilgrims; and to kings' processions glittering with gold and glossy with velvets; to armies on their way to fight; and further ahead, to coaches

plying along the Portsmouth road. I wonder how many people in the hundreds of motors that flash back and forth each day do think of it all? I pity those who don't, because they lose a thought that might embroider their world with rich colours.

P.P.S.—I met Sir Lionel, accidentally, of course, in the cathedral this morning, where he, too, was saying good-bye to the most fascinating of the old tombs. And was n't it odd, we had the same favourites? They looked even nicer and queerer than yesterday, with no Mrs. Norton to spatter inappropriate remarks about.

We walked back to the hotel together, and he asked me, just as we were coming in, whether my allowance was enough, or would I like to have more?

I had burst out that it was heaps, before I stopped to realize that he was asking that question really of Ellaline, not of me. Perhaps I ought to have temporized, and said I would make up my mind in a few days — meanwhile writing to her. I suppose she must be quite an heiress; but he can't be as mercenary as she thinks, or he would n't have made such a suggestion.

I 'm called! The motor 's ready. I 'll post this from the hotel.

IX

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Southsea, July 19th

Dearest: This address is n't part of our plan of campaign. We 'd meant to pass through, after pausing on the way just long enough to see Portsmouth Harbour, and Dickens's birthplace; but we 've stopped here on my account, and now I wish we had n't. I 'll tell you why, in a minute; but if I don't mention a few other things first, they 'll be crowded out, and I shall forget them.

After we 'd seen the birthplace, and were seeing the harbour, Sir Lionel asked if I 'd care to go on board a man-o'-war. Of course, my answer was "Yes"; and he said there was an old friend of his whom he would like to see, Captain Starlin, of the *Thunderer*, so he 'd ask for an invitation.

He scribbled things in pencil on a visiting-card, and sent it on board the big gray monster, by a nice low-necked sailor. Of course, the invitation which came back was most cordial, and even Mrs. Norton appeared pleased with the idea of going over the ship. We were received by the Captain himself — rather a young-looking man, whose complexion seemed to have slipped down, like Sir Lionel's, both their foreheads being quite white, and the rest of their faces tanned brown. He took us everywhere, showing us

interesting things, and presently said that, not only must we dine with him that evening, but must stay to a dance that was to be given on board afterward.

"Oh, many thanks, but we 're only motoring through, and go on this afternoon," began Sir Lionel. Then he stopped short, and looked at me. "Would you like to dance?" he asked.

"She has n't anything to wear, if she would," Mrs. Norton answered for me. "You were so strict about luggage, we 've only two evening dresses apiece, plain things for hotel dinners, nothing at all suitable to a dance."

"Did n't you buy her anything good enough for dances that day in Bond Street?" snapped the Dragon.

"*You* bought her several things almost too good for dances, at her age," retaliated the Dragon's sister, but only in a gentle coo. "They 're left at the Ritz, awaiting instructions to go on to Graylees, with most of our things, and will probably be all beggars' creases before she has a chance to wear them."

"She shall have a chance to wear any or all of them to-night, if she wants to dance," said Sir Lionel.

"Of course she wants to dance," chimed in Captain Starlin. "Did you ever see a young lady who did n't want to dance, especially on a man-o'-war?"

"*Do* you want to?" repeated the Dragon.

Between them I was quite dashed, and murmured something non-committal about its being very nice, if it had been convenient, but ——

"'There is no 'but,' " said Ellaline's guardian. "That settles it. We stop the night in Southsea, where there 's no doubt a good hotel; and I will send someone immedi-

ately to the Ritz for your boxes, Emily — and yours." He never calls me by name if he can help it.

Emily was inclined to object that it would be foolish to send, and we did n't want all our things anyway, till her brother gave her a look — not cross, but — well, just one of his looks that make you do things, or stop doing them, whichever he pleases; and she did n't say any more.

I can't help rather liking his masterful ways, though they 're old-fashioned now that we 're all supposed to think we need votes more than frocks; but this time it really would have been ungrateful of me to disapprove, as the whole fuss was being made for me. And I was dying to go to the dance!

We went quickly back to the motor, spun into Southsea, and before the female contingent knew exactly what was happening to it, rooms were engaged for the night, and a "responsible person" despatched by the first train to town, with a letter demanding certain articles of our luggage.

I was quite excited about the evening, but outwardly was "more than usual calm," as we wandered here and there, after luncheon, seeing Southsea — which must, by the way, be a most convenient place for girls, as they can choose between Navy and Army, or play with both if they are pretty enough. Just as we were going to have a run out to Hayling Island in the car, whom should we meet in the street, close to our hotel, but Mrs. Senter and Dick Burden.

She was looking very fetching and young, almost like a girl, certainly as unlike an aunt as possible. And, mother, I *know* it was n't an accident. I don't mean about her being an aunt, of course, but being in Southsea and meeting us.

The day she called, in London, when Sir Lionel was in Warwickshire, I heard her asking Mrs. Norton questions about our route; and when dear Emily mentioned Winchester, she said, "Oh, won't you be passing through Southsea?"

Mrs. Norton answered in her vague little way that she was sure she did n't know. Then Mrs. Senter went on to say that she and Dick were invited to stay at a house near Southsea, and she thought they would probably accept. Perhaps, if they did, we might meet. But, as I wrote you, I thought it more likely we would n't, unless Sir Lionel should seem keen when he heard; and he *did n't*. He apparently took no interest whatever when his sister repeated the conversation to him next day.

Well, I 'm sure Mrs. Senter made up her mind to accept her friend's invitation (even if she did n't ask for one) the minute she found out that we were likely soon to pass Southsea. She must have known we would be sure to stop for a look round Portsmouth and the neighbourhood, and thought the chance worth taking. If she had n't, she would have stopped in London till the end of the season, no doubt, for she 's the kind of person who lives for Society, and only cares for the country when it 's the fashion to be in it.

I would n't be a bit surprised if she 'd been patrolling the streets of Portsmouth and Southsea for a day or two, in the hope of running across us sooner or later. Or, as Dick Burden fancies himself in the part of a detective, perhaps he hit upon some surer way of getting at us.

Those two, aunt and nephew, play into each other's hands beautifully. Mamma, it seems, is visiting in Scot-

land at the moment, so they hunt in couples. How long "Aunt Gwen" has been a widow the saints may know; I don't — but anyway she has begun to "take notice," as people say about bright little babies. She has looked up Sir Lionel in Debrett, and marked him with a red cross for her own, I believe. Such impudence! A woman like that, to dare think of trying to grab a man of his position and record! She ought to know how unsuitable she would be for him.

As for Dick, of course he wants to flirt with me; but wait — wait till you hear the latest developments.

Sir Lionel seemed neither pleased nor displeased at the meeting, but he could not have suspected it was more than an accident, for he remarked that it was odd we should run up against each other like this!

Mrs. Senter said yes, indeed, it was, she was never more surprised in her life, though really it would have been odd, when one came to think of it, if we had n't met, since she and Dick were stopping with friends on Hayling Island, and were constantly in Southsea.

"Do let me write a note to my friend Captain Starlin, and get you all invitations to the *Thunderer* dance to-night," she tacked on to the tail of her explanation.

"He 's an old friend of mine, too," said Sir Lionel, "and we 've not only invitations already, but have accepted them, and sent for my sister's and Miss Lethbridge's clothes."

Her face fell a little for an instant when she heard we 'd sent for clothes, as probably Emily and I would have suited her better in our worst things; but she brightened up and said how pleased she was, because she and Dick

were both going, and now they would really look forward to the dance; Dick had been bored with the idea before.

Well, the boxes came in good time, and the Bond Street darlings were n't crushed in the least, because I had put them to bed so nicely with sheets and pillows of tissue paper. I decided to wear a pink chiffon, with tiny button roses laid like a dainty frame all round the low neck and where the sleeves ought to have been but were n't. The chiffon 's embroidered with roses to match. Can you imagine me in such a dream? I can't. But it suits me, rather. I wore pink shoes and stockings and gloves, all of the same shade, and poor Emily in gray silk, with her hair done in an aggressively virtuous way, looked like a cross between an Anglican nun and a tourist economizing luggage. Yet she would n't have been shocked if her brother 'd had a harem in Bengal, because it was "good form." But of course, as she says, one is obliged to excuse things in men.

It was very amusing having dinner in the Captain's room, which was large and quite charming, with curtains and frilly silk cushions, and heaps of framed, signed photographs, and books, almost as if a woman had arranged it. But he told us one felt the motion there, more than anywhere else, in a storm; which must be some consolation to the "middies" who have to work for years before they can ever hope for such luxurious quarters.

Mrs. Senter and Dick were n't at dinner, which was one comfort. Besides ourselves, there were only the Captain's married sister, who had come from town for the dance, and

her husband. The husband 's an earl — Lord Knaresbrook; rather old; but Lady Knaresbrook is young, frightfully pretty, and knows it. She flirted fascinatingly at dinner with Sir Lionel; not as Mrs. Senter flirts, flickering her eyelashes, saying smart things as if to amuse him alone, and hang everyone else! — but just looking at him, with gorgeous, starry eyes; asking a question now and then, and listening with all her soul. I 'm not sure it is n't an equally effective way, especially when done in a diamond tiara by a countess under twenty-five. I should quite have enjoyed watching it if Sir Lionel had been a stranger, but knowing him somehow made me feel 'pon honour not to look, and rather restless. I do believe that, compared with some of these men, who 've been at the other end of the world for years doing important political things, Samson with his hair all cropped off was *adamant* to Lovely Woman!

Naturally, I had to have something to look at, and I could n't look at Lord Knaresbrook because the shape of his nose worried me; and anyhow he wanted to talk to Emily about people they both knew. Such exciting bits as this floated to my ears: "Ah, yes, *he* was the great-grandson of Lord This. She married the Duke of That's second cousin." So I looked a good deal at Captain Starlin, and he looked at me and not at very much else, which was quite easy, the most important lady being his own sister, who took the place of hostess; so Mrs. Norton was on his right and I on his left. As he was our host, and evidently wanted to flirt a little, I thought it my duty to gratify his wish, and played up to him. That was quite right, was n't it? I 'm sure you 'll say yes, as you are a

Parisienne, and have brought me up to do unto others as I would be done by. But several times I happened to catch Sir Lionel's eyes, and they had a gloomy glint in them; not angry, but as if he 'd discovered a screw loose in me. I felt as uncomfortable as you do with a smudge on your nose, which you see in shop-window mirrors when you 've forgotten your handkerchief; but it was too late to change my behaviour suddenly, so I went on as I had begun.

We mere females did n't leave the men at the table, perhaps because there was n't any place where it would have been proper for us to wander unmanned. We sat for hours, and Lady Knaresbrook smoked, and wanted us to smoke, though of course she must have known that no woman with her hair done like Emily's *would*. Emily looked shocked, but just pressed in her lips, and did n't disapprove out aloud, as she might if Lady Knaresbrook had been plain "Mrs." But afterward she told me she was now ready to believe "all they say" about Diana Knaresbrook. Just because she smoked! Mrs. Norton could find immorality in a hard-boiled egg if she looked for it.

At last we went above, or whatever you call it on a ship, and everything had been made beautiful with flags and bunting; but *nothing* was as beautiful as those sailor men themselves, especially the middies. I felt like their mother (I hope that 's not unmaidenly?) and should have loved to smooth their hair and pat them on the cheek — of which, by the way, they had plenty!

A good many were introduced to me; and Dick brought his aunt very early, because, he said, he did n't want to

find all my dances gone. You can believe I had n't saved any for *him!* But as a matter of fact, I had kept back two, thinking Sir Lionel might ask me; for after his many kindnesses I should n't have liked to seem not to want to dance with him, you see. When he did n't ask at first, I supposed it might be because he was n't a dancing man (horrid expression! — sounds like a trained bear); but presently I saw him waltzing with Lady Knaresbrook; and he danced beautifully, as if he 'd done nothing else all those years in Bengal. Then I said to myself: "He 's vexed with me because he thinks I behaved badly at dinner, and perhaps I did." And I almost hoped he would suggest sitting out a dance, so that we could talk.

But then Dick came; and when he found I had two dances, he wanted them both. "There are things I must tell you," he said. And, mother, it 's easy to see that the creature has some talent as a detective, because he guessed at once why I 'd been saving those dances.

"It 's no good keeping anything up your sleeve for Pendragon," said he, in his perky way, as if he were on an equality with the ex-Lieutenant-Governor of East Bengal. "He won't ask you to dance. He thinks you 're a little girl, and is leaving you to little boys, like me, which is quite right. The only woman he 's ever taken any interest in for the last fifteen years is Aunt Gwen. And you can't say he does n't show good taste."

I could n't, especially as Mrs. Senter was looking like the heroine of a novel which you 'd be sure to forbid my reading; so I gave him the dances, partly for that reason and partly because I was cowardly enough to want to hear what he had to tell. Just at the moment he could n't say

more, though, because a sweet brown lamb of a middy came and whirled me away. So it went on for half the evening, until it was nearly time for Dick Burden's first dance, and I was sitting down to breathe (after a furious galop, which did n't go at all well with a Directoire dress), beside Mrs. Norton, who had the air of thinking a ball-room a sort of pound for lost souls.

Up came Sir Lionel as if to speak to her, and — I don't know what made me do it — I said, "I saved a dance for you, but you never asked me for it, so I gave it to someone else."

His face got red. Perhaps he thought I was lecturing him for being rude.

"Did you give it to Starlin?" he asked, bluntly.

"No. I 've had mine with Captain Starlin. To Mr. Burden," said I.

"Do you want to dance it with him?"

"Not at all."

"Chuck him, then, and dance it with me. I should like to talk to you."

"That 's what he said."

"Do you want to hear what he 's got to say?"

(Well, you know, dear, I *had* wanted to; but suddenly I felt as if Dick did n't matter more than a fly, nor did any one else except the person I was talking to. You *do* feel like that with these quiet, masterful sort of people, whether you care for them or not. It 's just a kind of momentary hypnotism; or, at least, that 's the definition I 've been giving myself.)

"I don't want to hear what he 's got to say," my hypnotized Me answered, in the queer, abrupt way in which we

had begun snapping out little short sentences to each other. "I 'm sure he could n't say anything really interesting."

"Don't you like Dick Burden?"

"Not much."

"Then the dance is mine. Which is it?"

"The next. Here he comes now. I see the top of his head, over the shoulder of that youth with the collar of a curate and the face of a convict."

The Dragon smiled benevolently at my wicked description of a comparatively inoffensive person, and whisked me off.

"Are you offended with me?" I asked, as we waltzed a weird but heavenly Hungarian waltz (made in Germany).

"Why do you ask that?" he wanted to know.

"Because you looked offended at dinner. What had I done? Eaten something with the wrong fork?"

"You had done nothing I ought n't to have been prepared to see you do."

"What ought you to be prepared to see me do?"

"It does n't matter now."

"It does. If you don't tell me, I shall scream 'Murder' at the top of my lungs, and then you 'll have to speak."

"I certainly would n't. I 'd bundle you home at once."

"I have n't got any home."

"My home is yours, till you marry."

"Or you do."

"Don't talk nonsense." (He was probably going to say "Tommy-rot" but considered such striking words unfit for the ear of a débutante. This *was* my début, I suppose? My very first ball.)

"Then tell me what you were unprepared for in me."

"I was prepared for it at first, before I saw you. But——"

"What?"

"Well, if you will have it, for your flirting."

Suddenly I felt impish, and said, innocently, that I supposed it was what girls came on board men-o'-war to do, so I had only done my best to please. By this time we 'd stopped dancing, and were sitting down. I 'd forgotten Dick Burden.

"It all depends upon the point of view," he answered, with rather a disgusted air.

"My point of view is," said I, gravely, "that soldiers as *well* as sailors should approve of flirting, because flirtation is a warlike act; a short incursion into the enemy's country, with the full intention of getting back untouched."

"Ah, but what of the enemy?" suggested the Dragon.

"He can always take care of himself on such incursions."

"So that 's the theory? And at nineteen you have enlisted in that army?"

"What army?"

"The great army of flirts."

I could n't keep it up any longer, for I had really started in to explain, not to joke. And you know, dear, that flirting as a profession would n't be in my line at all.

"Do I look like a flirt?" I asked.

"No. You don't," said he. "And I was beginning to hope ——"

"Please go on hoping, then," I said. "Because I did n't want to behave badly. If I did, it was because I don't quite know the game yet. And I wanted to tell you that

I did n't really mean to be silly and schoolgirlish, and disgrace you and Mrs. Norton."

Then it was his turn to apologize, and he did it thoroughly. He said that I had n't been silly, and so far from disgracing him, he was proud of me — "proud of his ward." It was only that I seemed so much more womanly and companionable than he 'd expected, that he could n't bear to see in me, or think he saw, any likeness whatever to inferior types of woman. Whereupon I had the impertinence to ask *why* he 'd expected me to be inferior; but the only explanation I could get him to make was that he did n't know much about girls. Which he had remarked before.

We 'd sat out two dances before we — I mean I — knew it; and nobody had dared to come near us, because a middy can't very well snatch a partner out of a celebrity's pocket. And Dick, too, though he seems to have the courage of most of his convictions, drew the line at that. But suddenly I did remember. I smiled at a hovering laddie with the most smoothly polished hair you ever saw, just like a black helmet; and when the laddie had swung me away in the Merry Widow waltz Sir Lionel went back to Mrs. Senter. Rather an appropriate air for her to dance to, I thought. I do pray I 'm not getting kittencatty? Anyhow, I 'm not in my *second* kittenhood!

You will be wondering by this time why I 'm sorry we stayed at Southsea, when it was all for me, and I seem to have been having the "time of my life." But I 'm coming to the part you want to know about.

I thought perhaps Dick Burden would be vexed at my going off with Sir Lionel, under his nose, just as he was

ready to say "my dance." However, he walked up to me as if nothing had happened, when it was time for the second, so I did n't apologize. I thought it best to let sleeping partners lie.

We danced a little, but Dick, who is one-and-twenty, does n't waltz half as well as Sir Lionel, who is forty; and he saw that I thought so. Presently he asked if I 'd rather sit out the rest, and I answered, yes; so he said he would tell me the things he had to say. He found a quiet place, which must have looked as if deliberately selected for a desperate flirtation; and then he did n't do much beating about the bush. He just told me that he *knew everything.* He 'd partly "detected" it, and partly found out by chance; but of course he made the most of the detecting bit.

Don't be frightened and get a palpitation at the news, dearest; it is n't worth it. There 's going to be no flare-up. Of course, if I were the heroine of a really nice melodrama, in such a scene as Dick and I went through, I should have been accompanied by slow music, with lime-light every time I turned my head, which would have heartened me up very much; while Dick would have had villain music — plink, plink, plunk! But I did as well as I could without an accompaniment, and I think, on the whole, managed the business very well.

You see, I had to think of Ellaline. I dared not let her out of my mind for a single instant, for if I should fail her now, at the crucial time, it would be my fault if her love story burst and went up the spout. If I 'd stopped thinking of her, and saying in my mind while Dick talked, "I must save Ellaline, no matter what happens to me!" I

should certainly have boxed his ears and told him to go to limbo.

He began by telling me that he 'd met a friend of mine, a Miss Bennett — Kathy Bennett. Oh, mother, just for a minute my heart beat under my pretty frock like a bird caught in a child's hand! You remember my writing you what a friendship Ellaline and Kathy struck up, before Kathy left school to go back to England, and how she sent Ellaline cuttings from the London Radical papers about Sir Lionel Pendragon in Bengal? I do think it 's almost ungentlemanly of so many coincidences to happen in connection with what I 'm trying to do for Ellaline. But Kathy 's such a lump, it 's too great a compliment to call her a coincidence. Anyhow, Dick met her in town, at a tea party (a "bun worry," he called it) where he went with his dear Aunt Gwen; and when Kathy mentioned being at school at Madame de Maluet's, he asked if she knew Miss Lethbridge. She said of course she did, and she thought Ellaline was a "very naughty little thing" not to write or come and see her. She had read in the papers about the arrival of Sir Lionel with his sister and ward, you see.

Dick remarked that he 'd hardly call Miss Lethbridge a "little thing," whereupon Kathy defended her adjective by saying Ellaline was only about up to her ear.

Of course that set Mr. Dick's detective bump to throbbing furiously. He reassured me by announcing that he had n't said any more to Kathy, but that he 'd thought a lot. In fact, he thought so much that he asked if she 'd give him a line of introduction to Madame, as he had a cousin who wanted to go to a French school, and next

time he "ran across to Paris," he might have a look at Versailles. Kathy gave the note, and that same night, if you 'll believe it, the horrid little boy did "run across." At the earliest hour possible in the morning he called at the school, only to find Madame already away for her holidays. But you know she always leaves her sister, Mademoiselle Prado, to look after things, and when Mademoiselle heard what Dick wanted, she showed him all over the place. He said he would like to see photographs of the young ladies in groups, if any such existed, because he could write his Australian cousin what nice, happy-looking girls they were. Promptly that poor, unsuspecting female produced the big picture Madame had done of the tea-party on the lawn, a year ago in June, and there was I in it. But Dick was too foxy to begin by asking questions about me. Kathy adorned the photograph also, with Ellaline on her right and me in the perspective of her left ear, which must have seemed to point at me accusingly. Dick could claim Kathy quite naturally, as he 'd come with her letter, and presently he led up to me, saying he seemed to have seen me somewhere. Was I a great friend of Miss Bennett's, and was it probable that she had my portrait?

Mademoiselle innocently said no, Miss Bennett was much more likely to have Mees Lethbridge's portrait than Mees Brendon's, as Mees Brendon was not a pupil of the school, only a teacher of singing, and Mees Kathy was not musical. But Mees Lethbridge, *la petite jeune fille* on the right, was a friend of Mees Bennett.

Now you 'll admit that Dick was rather smart to have chopped all these branches off the tree of knowledge with

his little hatchet. I think his cleverness worthy of a better cause.

The next thing he did was to ask, naïvely, if *that* Miss Lethbridge was *the* Miss Lethbridge — the ward of Sir Lionel Pendragon, so much talked of in the papers just now? Proud that her sister's school had moulded a celebrity, Mademoiselle chatted away about Ellaline, saying what a dear child she was, how sorry Madame was to part from her, and how Madame de Blanchemain, Ellaline's *chère marraine*, at St. Cloud, must be missing her *mignonne* at this very moment.

It goes without saying that Mr. Dick's next step took him at a single stride to St. Cloud. He did n't call on Madame de Blanchemain, not wishing to stir up a tempest in a teapot, but simply pryed and peered, and did all sorts of sneaky things, only excusable in a professional detective, who must (or thinks he must) live.

He found out about Madame de Blanchemain's nephew, Ellaline's Honoré, and put this and that together, until he 'd patched up the theory of a love affair. But further he dared not go, on that track, so he pranced back to Versailles, and found out things about Audrie Brendon.

The way he did that was through noticing the name of the Versailles photographer who took the group in the garden. Dick called on him, and said he wanted a copy of the picture, because his "cousin" was in it. The man had several on hand, as parents occasionally wrote for them, and when Dick got his he inquired who I was. The obliging photographer, perhaps scenting a romance, told him I lived in the Rue Chapeau de Marie Antoinette with

my mother. Then the wretch actually had the impudence to describe to me a visit he paid our apartment, ringing at the door, and asking dear Philomene for Madame Brendon!

In five minutes, he had heard all our family affairs, as far as that dear, simple, talkative soul could tell him. That you were in Switzerland, and I had gone to England to visit a friend.

I sat and listened to the end of the story, saying never a word, though I was in one of the moods which make me a person that nobody but myself could stand for a moment. I should simply have smiled if wild horses had come along to tear him in two.

"So you see," said he, at last, when I did n't speak, "I 'm in the game with you."

"It is n't my game," said I.

"You 're playing it," said he.

"Because I have to," said I.

"Is it Sir Lionel who 's making you play it?" he asked.

"Oh, dear, no," I broke out, before I stopped to think.

"Then, he is n't in it?"

I thought it looked more respectable to admit that, whatever the "game" was, Sir Lionel and I were not playing it together.

"You 're doing it for your friend," deduced our young detective.

I gently intimated that that was *my* business. But Mr. Burden advised me that I would be wise to accept him as my partner if I did n't want the business to fail.

"What have I done to you, that you should interfere?" I wanted to know, only I did n't dare — actually did n't

dare, for Ellaline's sake, to speak angrily. Oh, I did feel like a worm's paper doll!

"You 've made me like you, awfully," he said.

"Then you should n't want to do me any harm," I suggested.

"I don't want to do you harm," he defended himself. "What I want is to see as much of you as possible, and also I 'd like to give Aunt Gwen a little pleasure, thrown in with mine. I want you to ask Sir Lionel to invite us to join your party. There 's plenty of room for us in that big motor-car of his. I went to see it in the garage to-day."

"You *would!*" I could n't resist sputtering. But he took no notice.

"You need n't be afraid that Aunt Gwen 's in this," he went on to assure me. "I 've kept mum as an oyster. All she knows is that I saw you — Miss Lethbridge — in Paris, and have n't been the same man since. She helped me get to know you, of course. She 's a great chum of mine, and her being an old pal of Sir Lionel's too, meant a lot for me in the beginning. She 's a ripper, and stanch as they make 'em — but they *don't* make 'em perfectly stanch where other women are concerned. And as long as you and I hunt in couples she shan't have a suspicion."

"You 'd tell her, if I refused to hunt in that way?" I asked.

"I might think it my duty to let Sir Lionel know how he 's being humbugged. At present I 'm shuttin' my eyes to duty, and lookin' at you. What?"

"Why does Mrs. Senter want to come with us?" I ventured to inquire.

"Because," explained her loyal nephew, "she 's fed up

with visiting, and she loves motoring. So do I, with the right people. I 'm sure it 's not much to ask. We won't sponge on Sir Lionel. We 'll pay our own hotel bills; and I 'm sure, even though you are in a wax with me just now, you must admit Aunt Gwen and I would wake things up a bit — what? All 's fair in love and war, so you ought n't to blame me for anything I 've done. You 'd think it jolly well romantic if you read it in a book."

I denied this, but said I would consider. He must give me till to-morrow morning to make up my mind; which he flatly refused to do. To-morrow would be too late. He saw in my eye that I hoped to slip off, but it was "no good my being foxy." Things must be fixed up, or *blown* up, on board this ship to-night.

Whether or not he really meant to do his worst, if I would n't give in, I can't be sure, but he looked as obstinate as six pigs, and I did n't dare risk Ellaline's future. My *own* impression is that there 's a *big* mistake somewhere, and that she would be perfectly safe in Sir Lionel's hands if she would tell him frankly all about Honoré du Guesclin — I, meanwhile, vanishing through a stage trap or something. But she may be right. And I *may* be wrong. That 's why I was forced to promise Dick. And I kept my promise, as soon as we got home to our hotel — Sir Lionel, Mrs. Norton, and I.

I knew it would be a most horrid thing to do, but it was even horrider than I thought.

All the way going back I was planning what to say, and feeling damp on the forehead, thinking how impudent it would seem in *me*, a young girl and a guest, to make such a suggestion. But it had to be done, so I screwed up my

courage, swallowed half of it again, with a lump in my throat, and exclaimed in a gay, spontaneous way, like the sweet, innocent angel I am: "Oh, Sir Lionel, *wouldn't* it be fun if Mrs. Senter and — and her nephew were going with us for a little way? They both love motoring."

He looked surprised and Emily pursed her lips.

"Do you want them to come?" he asked.

"Well, I just thought of it," I stammered.

"I thought you did n't like Burden," he said. No wonder, as I 'd unfortunately unbosomed myself of my real sentiments not three hours before!

"I think he 's amusing enough," I tried to slide out of the difficulty. "And Mrs Senter probably would n't go without him."

"I somehow gathered an impression that you did n't admire her particularly," went on Sir Lionel, looking at me with a very straight look.

"Oh, I never said so!" I cried. "I admire her immensely."

"In that case, I 'll ask them, with pleasure," said Sir Lionel. "The idea did cross my mind in London, but I did n't think you 'd care for it, somehow. Emily will be pleased, I know. Won't you, Emily? And if Mrs. Senter will be as reasonable as you two in the matter of luggage we shall have plenty of room."

"It is your car, and the idea of the tour is yours," said Mrs. Norton, very feminine and resigned, also feeling that my "cheek" deserved a tiny scratch. "I am pleased with whatever pleases *you*."

Next morning (or rather the *same* morning, and *this* morning) Sir Lionel got his sister to write a note to Mrs.

Senter, and he wrote one too, or added a P. S. "Aunt Gwen's" reply was a ladylike warwhoop of joy; and we are now waiting till the latest additions to our party have broken the news to their hostess at Hayling Island, packed a few things to take, and sent the rest "home" (wherever that may be) with Mrs. Senter's maid.

Good-bye, my Parisienne Angel.

Your broken and badly repaired

AUDRIE-ELLALINE.

I long to hear whether you think I ought to have braved Dick.

X

SIR LIONEL PENDRAGON TO COLONEL PATRICK O'HAGAN

Royal Hotel, Winchester
July 21st. Night

My dear Pat: I thought of you on the Portsmouth Downs yesterday, remembering a tramp you and I had together, "exploring wild England," as we called it. We then had a pose that all England, except "town," was wild — save only and always when there was any shooting of poor silly pheasants or hunting of "that pleasant little gentleman," the fox.

After running out through Portsmouth, I suggested stopping the car and mounting the downs above, on foot, for a look at the view. There are now five in our party, instead of three — not counting Young Nick, who has no stomach for views. At Ellaline's expressed wish, Mrs. Senter and Dick Burden have come on with us from Hayling Island, where they were staying. We met them at a dance on the *Thunderer*, which Starlin captains. They have been invited to be of the party for a fortnight or so.

I should rather have liked to watch Ellaline's face as she climbed the hill, her feet light on yielding grass, where the gold of buttercups and turquoise of harebells lay

scattered —as she climbed, and as she reached the top, to see England spread under her eyes like a great ring. But that privilege was Burden's. I hope he appreciated it. Mine was to escort Mrs. Senter. I was glad she did n't chat. I hate women who chat, or spray adjectives over a view.

You remember it all, don't you? On one side, looking landward, we had a Constable picture: a sky with tumbled clouds, shadowed downs, and forests cleft by a golden mosaic of meadows. Seaward, an impressionist sketch of Whistler's: Southampton Water and historic Portsmouth Harbour; stretches of glittering sand with the sea lying in ragged patches on it here and there like great pieces of broken glass. Over all, the English sunshine pale as an alloy of gold and silver; not too dazzling, yet discreetly cheerful, like a Puritan maiden's smile; but not like Ellaline's. Hers can be dazzling when she is surprised and pleased.

I think I recall your talk with me on a height overlooking the harbour — perhaps the same height. We painted a lurid picture, to harrow our young minds, of the wreck of the *Royal George*. And we said, gazing across the Downs, that England looked almost uninhabited. Well, it appears no more populous now, luckily for the picture. I heard Ellaline saying to Dick Burden that the towns and villages might be playing at hide and seek, they concealed themselves so successfully. Also I heard her advise him to read "Puck of Pook's Hill," and was somewhat disappointed that she 'd already had it, as I bought it for her in Southsea yesterday. Probably she won't care to read it again. Perhaps I had better give the

book to Mrs. Senter, who is a more intellectual woman than you and I supposed when she was playing with us all in India. But one does n't talk books with pretty women in the East.

You remember the day you and I walked to Winchester from Portsmouth, starting early in the morning, with our lunch in our pockets? Well, we came along the same way, past old William of Wykeham's Wickham, the queer mill built of the *Chesapeake's* timbers, and Bishops' Waltham, where the ruins of the Episcopal palace struck me as being grander than I had realized. Ellaline was astonished at coming upon such a splendid monument of the past by the roadside, and was delighted to hear of the entertainment Cœur de Lion was given in the palace after his return from the German captivity. Of course the story of the famous "Waltham Blacks" pleased her too. Women can always forgive thieves, provided they 're young, gay, and well born.

When Mrs. Senter found that Ellaline and my sister were in the habit of sitting in the tonneau, Young Nick beside me, she asked, after a little hesitation, if she might take his place, leaving the chauffeur to curl himself up on the emergency seat at my feet. She said that half the fun of motoring was to sit by the man at the wheel and share his impressions, like being in the forefront of battle, or going to the first performance of a play, or being in at the death with a hunt. So now you can imagine me with an amusing neighbour, for naturally I consented to the change. Neither Ellaline nor Emily had suggested companioning me, and though I must say I had thought of proposing it to Ellaline, I had n't found the courage.

She would no doubt have been too polite to refuse, while perhaps disliking the plan heartily. Now, Burden has been allotted a place with her and my sister, which is probably agreeable to Ellaline.

Curious! Even the frankest of girls — and I believe Ellaline to be as frank as her sex allows — can be secretive in an apparently motiveless way. Why should she tell me one moment that she did n't like Burden, and the next (practically) ask me to invite him and his aunt to travel with us, because she "admires Mrs. Senter immensely"? Or perhaps it is that the child does n't know her own mind. I am studying her with deepening interest, but am not likely to have as many opportunities now there are more of us. She and Burden, being the young girl and the young man of the party, will, of course, be much together, and Mrs. Senter will fall to my lot for any excursions which may not interest, or be too tiring for, Emily. This boy's presence makes me realize, as I did n't until I had a young man of twenty-one constantly under my eyes, that the knocking of the "younger generation" has already begun to sound on my door. I had better hearken, I suppose, or some one else will kindly direct my attention to the noise. I confess I don't like it, but it 's best to know the worst, and keep the knowledge in the heart, rather than read it in the mockery of some pretty girl's eyes — a pretty girl to whom one is an "old boy," perhaps.

Jove, Pat, that sticks in my gorge! It 's not a thought to take to bed and go to sleep with if one wants pleasant dreams. I 'm stronger than I ever was, my health is perfect, I have few gray hairs, my back is straight. I feel

as if the elixir of youth ran hot in my veins. Yet one sees headlines in the papers, "Too Old at Forty." And — one is forty. It did n't matter — that is, I did n't think of it, until the coming of this boy.

His very ideas and manners are different from mine. No doubt they 're the approved ideas and manners of his generation, as we had ours at his age. I wear my hair short, and think no more of its existence except to wash and brush it; but this Dick parts his in the middle, and sleeks the long locks back, keeping them smooth as a surface of yellowish satin, with bear's grease or lard, or some appalling, perfumed compound. His look is a mixture of laziness and impudence, and half his sentences he ends up with "What?" or even "What-what?" His way with women is slightly condescending, and takes their approval for granted. There 's no youthful shyness about him, and what he wants he expects to get; but with *me* he puts on an irritating, though, I fear, conscientious air of deference that relegates me to the background of an older generation; sets me on a pedestal there, perhaps; but I have no wish for a pedestal.

Still, to do him justice, the lad is neither ill-looking nor ill-mannered. Indeed, woman may consider him engaging. His aunt seems devoted to him, and says he is irresistible to girls. I think if no "greenery yallery" haze floated before my eyes, I might see that he is rather a decent boy, extremely well-groomed, alert, with good, short features and bright eyes. When he walks with Ellaline he has no more than an inch the advantage of her in height, but he has a well-knit figure and a "Sandhurst bearing."

"Crabbed age and youth cannot live together."

Am I crabbed age?

Well, this long digression ought to bring me on as far as Winchester, where we came yesterday afternoon, late. We should have been earlier (though our start was delayed by our guests' preparations), but Ellaline was fascinated by the pretty village of Twyford. You remember it? She 'd been reading it up in a guide-book, and would stop for a look at the place where the Fair Fitzherbert was said to have been married to her handsome prince, later George IV. I can't recall hearing that story, though certainly Mrs. Fitzherbert's relations lived near; but I knew Pope was sent down from school there because of a satire he wrote on the master, and that Franklin visited and wrote in Twyford.

It was after four when I turned the car round that sharp corner which swings you into the Market Square of what is to me the grandest and most historic town of England. Why, it *is* England! Did n't the Romans get their Venta Belgarum, which finally developed into Winta-ceaster and Winchester, from the far older Celtic name for an important citadel? Was n't there a Christian church before the days of Arthur, my alleged ancestor? Was n't the cathedral begun by the father of Ælfred on the foundations of that poor church as well as those of a Roman temple? Was n't it here that the name of Anglia — England — was bestowed on the United Kingdoms, and was n't it from Winchester that Ælfred sent out the laws that made him and England "Great"?

Ellaline delights in the fact that the said Roman temple was Apollo's, as well as Concord's, she having named my

car Apollo, and the Sun God being her favourite mythological deity at the moment. Apropos of mythology, by the way, she was rather amusing this morning on the subject of Icarus, who, she contends, was the pioneer of sporting travel. If he did n't have "tyre trouble," said she, he had the nearest equivalent when his wax wings melted.

I should have enjoyed playing cicerone in Winchester, knowing and loving the place as I do, if it had n't been for Dick Burden's air of thinking such knowledge as mine quite the musty-fusty luggage of the old fogy. There 's no use pretending it did n't rub me up the wrong way!

Yesterday after arriving, Emily clamoured for tea, so we attempted no further sightseeing, but drove straight to this delightful old hotel, which was once a nunnery, and has still the nunnery garden, loved by the more enterprising of cathedral rooks. Or are they the nuns come back in disguise? This, you 'll guess, is Ellaline's idea.

On the way here, however, there was the beautiful City Cross in the High Street. It would have been a disgrace not to stop for a look at it, even though we could return; and Ellaline was most enthusiastic. She does n't know much about these things (how could she)? but she feels by instinct the beauty of all that is really fine; whereas Mrs. Senter, though maybe better instructed, is more *blasée*. Indeed, though she admires the right things, she is essentially the modern woman, whose interest is all in the present and future. I can't imagine her reading history for the sheer joy of it, as the child would and evidently has. Mrs. Senter would prefer a French novel; but it would have to

be well written. She would accept no trash. She has an elastic mind, I must say, and appeared satisfactorily shocked when I told her how the Cross would have been chopped up by Paving Commissioners in the eighteenth century if the people had n't howled for its salvation.

The same sort of fellows did dump Ælfred and his queen out of their comfortable stone coffins, you know, to use the stone. Brutes! What was St. Swithin thinking of to let them do it? A mercy it did n't occur to some commission to take down Stonehenge. They could have made a lot of streets with that.

In the Market Place, too, there was the ancient Fair of Winchester to think of, the fair that had no rival except Beaucaire; and I had been telling them all, on the way into the town, how the woods round the city used to swarm with robbers, hoping to plunder the rich merchants from far countries. Altogether, I fancy even Dick was somewhat impressed by the ancient as well as modern importance of Winchester by the time we drove to the hotel.

By and by, when we had our rooms and were washed and refreshed, we drank tea in the garden, where old-fashioned flowers were sweet; plenty of roses, stocks, and pansies. (I had an old Scottish nurse when I was a foot or two high, and I 've never forgotten what she said about pansies. "They have aye the face of a smacked cat!" It 's true, is n't it? A cat glares and puts its ears back when it 's smacked. Not that I ever smacked one to see.)

Afterward, I was not of a mind to propose anything. I thought each had better follow his or her inclination for what was left of the day; and mine was to stroll out and

review old memories. I should have liked to take Ellaline, but fancied she might prefer society nearer her own age. However, I came across her in the High Street, alone, gazing fascinated at the window of an antique shop. There are some attractive ones in Winchester.

I was n't sure if she were n't waiting for Dick, who might have strolled away from her for a minute, so I would have passed on if she had n't turned.

"Did you ever see anything so beautiful?" she asked me.

I had, but I did n't say so. I liked her to like everything in my Winchester, so I inquired what she admired most in the shop window. She hardly knew. But there was some wonderful old jewellery.

The girl was right. The antique jewellery was particularly good. There were some admirable necklaces and rings, with fine stones.

"What 's your birth month?" I asked, on a sudden thought.

"July," said she.

"What — this very month? I hope the birthday has n't passed."

"No-o, not yet," she answered reluctantly. She saw by now what was in the wind, and did n't want to seem greedy.

I persisted. "Tell me when."

"The twenty-fifth. But you are *not* to."

"Not to — what?"

"You know."

"Yes, I will. It 's a guardian's duty to his ward, and in this case a pleasure."

"I 'd much rather you did n't, really." And she

looked as grave as a statue of Justice. "Some day you 'll know why."

I waived the subject at this point, for I felt obstinate, and wanted to give her a present. There was, and is, no doubt in my mind that her reason is a schoolgirl reason. Madame de Maluet has probably brought her up to believe it is not *comme il faut* for a *jeune fille* to accept a present from a *monsieur*. Still, her voice and expression were so serious, even worried, that I 'm wondering if it could be anything else. Anyhow, I have bought the present, and intend to give it her on the 25th. It is a quaint old marquise ring, with a cabuchon ruby surrounded by very good diamonds. I think she will like it, and I don't see why she should n't have it — from me. I feel as if I would like to make up to her for the injustice I 've been doing her in my mind all these years since she was a little child, left to me — poor, lonely baby. Only I don't quite know how to make up. I don't even dare to confess myself, and say I am sorry I never seemed to take any interest in her as she grew up. She must have wondered why I never asked to have her picture sent me, or wanted her to write — or wrote; and she must have felt the cold neglect of the only person (except an old French lady, her godmother) who had any rights over her. Beast that I was! And I can't explain why I was a beast. No doubt she adores the legend (it can't be a memory) of her mother, and I would have it always so. She need never know any of the truth, though of course, when she marries I shall have to tell the man one or two things, I suppose.

I 'll let you know next time I write how the ring is received.

This morning, after breakfast, we all walked about the streets of Winchester, and, of course, went to the cathedral, where we stopped till nearly two o'clock.

The town and the place have all their old charm, and even more for me; the "Piazza"; the huddled, narrow streets full of mystery, the Cathedral Close with its crowded entrance, its tall trees that try to hide cathedral glories from common eyes; its mellow Queen Anne and Georgian houses which group round in a pleasant, self-satisfied way, as if they alone were worthy of standing-room in that sacred precinct.

To me, there 's no cathedral in England that means as much of the past as Winchester. You know how, in the nave, you see so plainly the transition from one architectural period to another? And then, there are those splendid Mortuary Chests. Think of old Kynegils, and the other Saxon kings lying inside, little heaps of haunted dust.

I was silly enough to be immensely pleased that the child picked out those Mortuary Chests in their high resting place, and the gorgeous alleged tomb of William Rufus, as the most unforgettable among the smaller interests of Winchester Cathedral, for they are the same with me; and it 's human to like our tastes shared by (a few) others. She was so enchanted to hear how William the Red was brought by a carter to be buried in Winchester, and about the great turquoise and the broken shaft of wood found in the tomb, that I had n't the heart to tell her it probably was n't his burial place, but that of Henri de Blois.

Of course she liked Bloody Mary's faldstool — the one Mary sat in for her marriage with Philip of Spain; and the MSS. signed by Ælfred the Great as a child, with his father.

Women are caught by the personal element, I think, more than we are. And so interested was she in Jane Austen's memorial tablet, that she would n't be satisfied without going to see the house where Jane died. There were so many other things to see, that Emily and Mrs. Senter would have left that out, but I wanted the girl to have her way.

Poor little, sweet-hearted Jane! She was only forty-one when she finished with this world — a year older than I. But doubtless that was almost old for a woman of her day, when girls married at sixteen, and took to middle-aged caps at twenty-five. Now, I notice, half the mothers look younger than their daughters — younger than any daughter would dare to look after she was "out."

A good many interesting persons seem to have died in Winchester, if they were n't clever enough to be born in the town. Earl Godwin set an early example in that respect. Died, eating with Edward the Confessor — probably too much, as his death was caused by apoplexy, and might not have happened if Edward had n't been too polite to advise him not to stuff.

Of course, the cathedral is the great jewel; but for me the old city is an ancient, kingly crown set full of jewels. There 's the West Gate, for instance. You know how we said it alone would be worth walking many miles to see. And the old castle. I 'm not sure that is n't one of the best sights of all. I took the party there after luncheon, and the same delightful fellow showed us round. He had n't changed since our time, unless he is more mellow.

He was quite angry to-day with a German-American

woman — the type, as Ellaline murmured to me, that alone is capable of a plaid blouse. The lady inquired nasally of our old friend, "Is this hall mod-ern; what you call mod-ern?"

We were at the moment gazing up at King Arthur's Round Table, which Henry VIII. hung on the wall to save it further vicissitudes, after Henry VII. had it daubed with colours and Tudor roses, to furnish forth some silly feast.

The dear old chap raised his eyebrows at the question, and glanced round as if apologizing to each massive pillar in turn. Well, he said, he would hardly call the hall modern, as it had been built by William the Conqueror, but perhaps the lady *might* be used to older things at home. With that, he turned on an indignant heel, and led us out to the courtyard where wretched Edward II.'s brother, the Duke of Kent, was executed. He has the same old trick of being "sorry to say" whenever he has anything tragic or gruesome to relate, passing lightly over details of oubliettes, and skeletons found without their heads — as so many were on grim St. Giles's Hill.

Of course we went and had a look at St. Cross and Henri de Blois's old hospital almshouse. We would have stopped there yesterday, if Emily had n't so ardently desired tea. But, if I 'd thought to tell her about the Dole of bread and beer, she might have been persuaded, though my description of the exquisite windows in the courtyard, and the quaint houses of the black and white brethren, left her cold. We all had some of the Dole to-day at the portal; and Mrs. Senter took it as a compliment that each one was given so little. Tourists get tiny bits,

you know, and beggars big ones; so she thought it would have been a sign that they disparaged the ladies' hats and frocks if they had been more generous. It would be difficult to disapprove of hers. She understands the art of dress to perfection.

A pity we could n't have been here earlier in the year, is n't it? For among the nicest new things in old Winchester are the Winchester schoolboys. How they spurn the ordinary tourist they meet in the street, and how scornfully polite they are to any unfortunate straying beast who asks them a question, making him feel meaner than any worm! A foreigner must long to ask the consequential youths to "kindly excuse him while he continues to breathe"; for few strangers can sympathize with the contempt we English have, while still in callow youth, for everyone we don't know. But, let a newcomer blossom into an acquaintance, or mention a relative at Eton, and all is changed. The Winchester boys turn into the most delightful chaps in the world.

I dare say I shall think Dick Burden a delightful chap when I know him better. At present, it 's all I can do to put up with him for the sake of his aunt. And the fellow has such an ostentatiously frank way of looking one straight in the eyes, that I 'm hanged if I 'd trust him to go as straight.

Talking of going straight, to-morrow morning early we leave for Salisbury, and when we feel like moving shall pass on toward the New Forest.

Ever yours,

PEN.

XI

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

White Hart Hotel, Salisbury
July 24th

Dearest: I am particularly homesick for you to-night, because it 's my birthday eve. Twenty-one to-morrow, but passing for nineteen. And is n't it annoying, I went and blurted out in Winchester two days ago that I had a birthday hanging over me. I 'm awfully afraid Sir Lionel thinks himself bound to give me a present. If he does, and I can't get out of taking it, I shall have to pass it on to Ellaline, of course, when I 'm passing everything else on — including myself.

I know you 're thinking of me to-night, as you walk after dinner under the glorious chestnut trees you describe in the park at Champel-les-Bains. I wish you had an astral body! It would n't take up any room, or have to pay railway fares, or wait for invitations to visit, and it could easily be one of the party in Sir Lionel's car. So nice to have it sitting between me and Dick Burden!

I wanted you dreadfully at Winchester, as I wrote you in the note I scribbled after seeing the cathedral. I wish I 'd told you more about Winchester then, for now it 's too late. All Stonehenge is lying on top of my Winchester impressions, and it will take them a little time to squeeze

from underneath. They will come out, though, I know, none the worse for wear. And how I shall talk this trip over with you, when we 're together again, and I know the end that 's hiding behind the motor-veil of the future!

Mother, dear, when I shut my eyes to-night, I see Barrows, billowing prehistorically along the horizon, and I see Stonehenge, black against a red sunset, and silver in the moonlight. Also, I have begun to *think* architecturally, I find, through seeing so much architecture, and trying to talk about it intelligently, as Mrs. Senter contrives to do. (I believe she fags it up at night, with a wet towel over her hair wavers!)

Do you know what it is to think architecturally? Well, for me (not apropos of Mrs. S. at all), a made-up woman is "well restored," or "repaired." An intellectual-looking man, with a fine head, has Norman bumps and Gothic ears. A puppy with big feet is an early Perp., with Norman foundations, and so on. It gives a new interest to life and the creatures we meet. Emily is late Georgian, with Victorian elevations.

I hated leaving Winchester; but oh, those Barrows we saw, when we were coming away! They made most antique things seem as new as a china cup with "For a Good Girl" outlined on it in gold letters. So many stupendous events have scattered themselves along this road of ours, as the centuries rolled, that it makes the brain reel, trying to gather them up, and sort them into some kind of sequence. Often I wish I could sit and admire calmly, as Mrs. Senter can, and not get boiling with excitement over the past. But one is so uncomfortably

intelligent, one can't stop thinking, thinking every minute. Every tiny thing I see has its little "thought sting," ready like a mosquito; and a fancy that has lately stabbed me is the striking resemblance between English scenery, or its features, and English character. The best bits in both are shy of showing themselves, and never flaunt. They are so reserved that to find them out you must search. All the loveliest nooks in English country and in English souls are hidden from strangers. Why, the very cottages try to hide under veils of clematis and roses, as the cottage children hide their thoughts behind long eyelashes.

We came to Salisbury by way of Romsey, and got out to see the splendid old church which almost ranks with Winchester Cathedral as a monument of England. And Romsey Abbey, too, very beautiful, even thrilling; still more ancient Hursley, with its earthworks, about which, for once, Sir Lionel and Dick Burden were congenial. Of course, men who have been soldiers like Sir Lionel, or tried to be soldiers and could n't, like Dick, must know something about the formation of such things; but anyone may be interested — except a Mrs. Norton.

You and I had no motoring when we were travellers, so we did n't see Europe as I am seeing England; still, I don't believe any other country has this individuality of vast, billowing downs. As you bowl smoothly from one to another, over perfect roads, you have a series of surprises, new beauties opening suddenly to your eyes. It is exciting, yet soothing; and that mingling of emotions is part of the joy of the car. For motorists, the downs of Hampshire and Wiltshire are like a goddess's beautiful

breasts; and Nature *is* a goddess, is n't she? — the greatest of all, combining all their best qualities.

This White Hart is a nice hotel, but I rather resent the foreign waiters, as out of the picture, in such an essentially old-fashioned, English place. I like the animal names of the hotels in England. Already we have seen a lot; and they form into a quaint, colourful, Noah's Ark and heraldic procession across the country. The Black Bull; The Golden Unicorn; The Blue Boar; The Red Lion; The Piebald Horse; The Green Dragon; The White Hart. I am still longing for a Purple Bear.

The first thing we did after getting settled (which I always like, as I have n't enough luggage to make much bother) was to walk out and see the town. I kept Dick with me, not because I wanted him, you may be sure, but because I can see he is a blot on the 'scutcheon for Sir Lionel, and I feel so guilty, having forced him into the party, that I try to attract the Blot to myself. If I mention the Blot in future, you 'll know what it is. When I 'm very desperate, I may just fling a drop of ink on the paper to relieve my feelings, and that will mean the same thing. The Blot puts on an air of the most exaggerated respect for Sir Lionel. You 'd fancy he was talking to a centenarian. Horrid, pert little pig! (I think pigs run in their family.) I know he does it on purpose to be nasty, and make Sir Lionel feel an old stager. Do you remember the pig-baby in "Alice's Adventures"?

> He only does it to annoy,
> Because he knows it teases.

Not that it need, for Sir Lionel looks about thirty-four. Nobody would give him forty unless they saw it in books;

and he is like a knight of romance. There! Now you have the opinion I have come to hold of Ellaline's dragon. For me, the Dragon has turned into a Knight. But, of course, I may be mistaken. Mrs. Senter says that no girl can ever possibly understand a man, and that a man is really much more complicated than a woman, though the novelists tell you it 's the other way round.

We started out, all of us, except Emily, who lies down after tea, to walk to John Halle's Hall, a most interesting banqueting room, which is now a china-shop, but was built by a rich wool-stapler (such a nice word!) in 1470, as you can see on the oak carvings. But there was so much to do on the way, that we saw the Hall, and the old George Inn — where Pepys lay "in a silk bed and had very good diet" — last of all.

The antique furniture shops were simply enthralling, and I wanted nearly everything I saw. Travelling is good for the mind, but it develops one or two of the worst passions, such as Greed of Possession. We went into several shops, and I could have purred with joy when Sir Lionel asked me to help him choose several things for Graylees, which he would have sent on there, direct. He seemed to care more for my advice than for Mrs. Senter's, and I don't think she quite liked that, for she really knows a good deal about old English furniture, whereas I know nothing — only a little about French and Italian things.

The streets of Salisbury, with their mediæval houses, look exactly as if they had been originally planned to give the most delightful effects possible when their pictures were taken. Every corner is a gem; and Sir Lionel told

us that the old rectangular part of the town *was* planned more or less at one time. Of course, the people who did the planning had plenty of time to think it all over, before moving down from Old Sarum, which was so high and bleak they could n't hear the priest saying mass in the cathedral, because of the wind. Fancy! Salisbury used to be called the "Venice of England"; but I must say, if one can judge now, the simile was far-fetched.

Lots of martyrs were burnt in Salisbury, it seems, when that sort of thing was in fashion, so no wonder they have to keep Bloody Queen Mary's chair in Winchester instead of Salisbury, where they 've a right to feel a grudge against the wretched little, bilious bigot of a lovesick woman. Sir Lionel has several well-known martyrs on his family tree, Mrs. Norton says; and she is as proud of them as most people are of royal bar-sinisters. I never thought martyrs particularly interesting myself, though perhaps that 's an uneasy jealousy, as we 've none in our family that I know of — only a witch or so on father's side. Poor dears, what a pity they could n't have waited till now to be born, when, instead of burning or drowning them, people would have paid them to tell nice things about the past and predict lovers for the future!

Witches were fascinating; but many martyrs probably marted out of sheer obstinacy, don't you think? Of course, it was different when they executed you without giving you a chance to recant, as they did with political prisoners; and do you know, they cut off poor witty Buckingham's head in Salisbury market-place? "So much for Buckingham!" Where it came off, there 's an inn, now, called the Saracen's Head. I wonder if *it* was

chopped off in the neighbourhood, too, or if it 's only a pleasant fancy, to cover up the Buckingham stain in the yard? Anyhow, they tell you there that in 1838 Buckingham's skeleton was dug up under the kitchen of what used to be the Blue Boar Inn. But even that is n't as ghastly a tale as another one of Salisbury: how one of Jack Cade's "quarters" was sent to the town when he 'd been executed. I should have liked to know if it 's still to be seen, but I thought it would be hardly nice to ask.

We saved the cathedral for the last, and just as we were in the midst of sight-seeing there, it was time for service, so we sat down and listened to music which seemed to fall from heaven. There 's nothing more glorious than music in a cathedral, is there? Usually it makes me feel good; but this time it made me feel so sinful, on account of Ellaline, and Sir Lionel and Dick, that I almost cried. Do you think, dear, that if I were in a novel they would have me for a heroine or a wicked adventuress? I hae me doots; but my one hope is, that you can't be an adventuress if you really mean well at heart, and are under twenty-two.

Maybe I 'd expected too much of Salisbury Cathedral, because I 'd always heard more about it than others in England, but it was n't quite so glorious to me as Winchester. It 's far more harmonious, because it was planned all at one time, like the town, and there 's singularly little foreign influence to be traced in the architecture, which makes it different from most others, and extraordinarily interesting in its way. It 's very, very old, too, but it is so white and clean that it looks new. And one great beauty it has: its whiteness seems always flooded

with moonlight, even when sunshine is streaming over the noble pillars and lovely tombs.

This morning I went back, with Emily, to service, and wandered from chapel to chapel, till nearly luncheon time. Then Sir Lionel came, and took me up strange, hidden, winding stairs, to the den of the librarian. It was like stealing into an enchanted castle, where all save the librarian slept, and had slept for centuries. When it was time to go away, I was afraid that Sir Lionel might have forgotten the magic spell which would open the door and let us escape. There were interesting things there, but we were n't allowed to look at the ones we wanted to see most, till we were too tired to enjoy them, after seeing the ones we did n't want to see at all. But you know, in another enchanted castle, that of the Sleeping Beauty, there was only *one* lovely princess, and goodness knows how many snorey bores.

At three, we started to motor out to Stonehenge; and Sir Lionel chose to be late, because he wanted to be there at sunset, which he knew — from memory — to be the most thrilling picture for us to carry away in our heads.

Nobody ever told me what an imposing sight Old Sarum remains, to this day, so I was surprised and impressed by the giant conical knoll standing up out of the plain and its own intrenchments. I 'd just been reading about it in the guide-book, how important it used to be to England, when it was still a city, and how it was a fortress of the Celts when the Romans came and snatched it from them; but I had no idea of its appearance. I would have liked to go with Sir Lionel to walk round the intrenchments, but he asked only Dick. However, Mrs. Senter volunteered

to go, at the last moment, just as they were starting, and Emily and I were left, flotsam and jetsam, in the car, to wait till they came back.

I was n't bored, however, because Emily read a religious novel by Marie Corelli, and did n't worry to talk. So I could sit in peace, seeing with my mind's eye the pageant of William the Conqueror reviewing his troops in the plain over which Old Sarum gloomily towers. Such a lurid plain it is, this month of poppies, red as if its arid slopes were stained with the blood of ghostly armies slain in battle.

But it was going back further into history to come to Amesbury. You know, dear, Queen Guinevere's Amesbury, where she repented in the nunnery she 'd founded, and the little novice sang to her "Too late! Too late!" When she was buried, King Arthur had "a hundred torches ever burning about the corpse of the queen." Can't you see the beautiful picture? And when her nunnery was gone in 980, another queen, far, far more wicked than Guinevere, built on the same spot a convent to expiate the murder of her stepson at Corfe Castle. We are going to Corfe, by and by, so I shall send my thoughts back to Amesbury from there, in spite of the fact that Elfreda's nuns became so naughty they had to be banished. Nor shall I forget a lover who loved at Amesbury — Sir George Rodney, who adored the fascinating Countess of Hertford so desperately, that after her marriage he composed some verses in her honour, and fell then upon his sword. Why don't men do such things for us nowadays? Were the "dear, dead women" so much more desirable than we?

Was n't Amesbury a beautiful "leading up" to Stonehenge? It 's quite near, you know. It does n't seem as if anything ought to be near, but a good many things are — such as farms. Yet they don't spoil it. You never even think of them, or of anything except Stonehenge itself, once you have seen the first great, dark finger of stone, pointing mysteriously skyward out of the vast plain.

That is the way Stonehenge breaks on you, suddenly, startlingly, like a cry in the night.

I was very glad we had the luck to arrive alone, for not long after we 'd entered the charmed, magic circle of the giant plinths, a procession of other motor-cars poured up to the gates. Droves of chauffeurs, and bevies of pretty ladies in motor hats swarmed like living anachronisms among the monuments of the past. Of course, *we* did n't seem to ourselves to be anachronisms, because what is horrid in other people is always quite different and excusable, or even piquant, in oneself; and I hastily argued that *our* motor, Apollo, the Sun God, was really appropriate in this place of fire worship. Even the Druids could n't have objected to *him*, although they would probably have sacrificed all of *us* in a bunch, unless we could have hastily proved that we were a new kind of god and goddess, driving chariots of fire. (Anyhow, motor-cars are making history just as much as the Druids did, so they ought to be welcome anywhere, in any scene, and they seem to have more right to be at Stonehenge than patronizing little Pepys.)

You remember Rolde, in Holland, don't you, with its miniature Stonehenge? Well, it might have been made for Druids' children to play dolls with, compared to this.

If the Phœnicians raised Stonehenge in worship of their fiery god, they had good reason to flatter themselves that it would attract his attention. And I do think it was sensible to choose the sun for a god. Next to our own true religion, that seems the most comforting. There was your deity, in full sight, looking after one side or the other of his world, all through the twenty-four hours.

I never felt more awe-stricken than I did passing under the shadow of those great sentinel plinths, guarding their sunken altar, hiding their own impenetrable mysteries. The winds seemed to blow more chill, and to whisper strangely, as if trying to tell secrets we could never understand. I love the legend of the Friar's Heel, but, after all, it 's only a mediæval legend, and it 's more interesting to think that, from the middle of the sacrificial altar, the priest could see the sun rise (at the summer solstice) just above that stupendous stone. I stood there, imagining a white-robed Druid looking up, his knife suspended over a fair girl victim, waiting to strike until his eye should meet the red eye of the sun. Oh, I shall have bad dreams about Stonehenge, I know! But I shan't mind, if I can dream about the Duke of Buckingham digging for treasure there at midnight. And if I were like Du Maurier's dear Peter Ibbetson, I could "dream back," and see at what far distance the builders of Stonehenge got their mysterious syenite, and that one black sandstone so different from the rest. I could dream who were the builders; whether Phœnicians, or mourning Britons of Arthur's day — as Geoffrey of Monmouth tells.

Sir Lionel and I like to think it was the Britons, for that

gives him a family feeling for the place, since he read out of a book Warton's sonnet:

> "Thou noblest monument of Albion's Isle,
> Whether by Merlin's aid from Scythia's shore
> To Amber's fatal plain Pendragon bore,
> Huge frame of giants' hands, the mighty pile
> To entomb his Britons slain by Hengist's guile,
> Or Druid priests, sprinkled with human gore,
> Taught 'mid the massy maze their mystic lore."

Next time, I want to see Stonehenge from an airship, or, at a pinch, a balloon, because I can judge better of the original form, the two circles and the two ellipses, which the handsomest policeman I ever saw out of a Christmas Annual explained to me, pacing the rough grass. He lives at Stonehenge all day, with a dog, and they are both guardians. I asked him if he had not beautiful thoughts, but he said, not in winter, Miss, it was too cold to think then, except about hot soup. Stonehenge is very becoming to this young man, especially at sunset. And, dearest, you can hardly imagine the glory of those piled stones as you look back at them, going slowly, slowly away, and seeing them purple-black against a crimson streak of sunset like a smoking torch.

We got lost, trying to find the river road, going home, and had great fun, straying into meadows, and onto ploughed ground, which poor Apollo resented. The way was beautiful, past some lovely old houses and exquisite cottages; and the Avon was idyllic in its pretty windings. But the villages of Wiltshire I don't find as poetical as those in Surrey and Sussex or Hampshire.

You would never guess what I 'm going to do to-morrow morning? I 'm not sure you 'd let me, if you knew. But

" The policeman explained to me "

a ward does n't need a chaperon with a guardian. He plays both parts. I 'm to get up early — before the sun is awake — and Sir Lionel is to motor me out to Stonehenge, so that I can see it by sunrise as well as sunset. It is a beautiful idea, and the handsome policeman has promised to be there and let us in.

Seeing a sunrise is like a glorified Private View, I think. I expect to feel as Louis of Bavaria must have felt when he had a Wagner opera all to himself.

Now I am going down to post this, so that it can leave for London by the last train, and start for Switzerland in the morning — of my birthday. I shall count the sunrise a birthday present from heaven if it 's fine; and if it is n't I shall know, what I suspect already, that I don't deserve one.

Your loving Changeling,

AUDRIE.

XII

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Compton Arms, Stony Cross, New Forest
July 25th

Little Star-Mother: It 's very late to-night, or early to-morrow, but I did want to write you on my birthday; and besides, I am in a hurry to tell you about the fairylike experience I have had. I am in fairyland even here and now; but I have been to the heart of it. I shall never forget.

Oh, but first — the sunrise, my birthday sunrise. It was wonderful, and made me think how much time I have wasted, hardly ever accepting its invitations. I believe I will turn over a new leaf. I shall get up very, very early every day, and go to bed very, very late, so as to squeeze all the juice out of the orange, and wring every minute out of my youth. I feel so alive, I don't want to lose the "morning glory." When I 'm old I shall do differently. I 'll go to bed directly after dinner and sleep late, so that age may be short, following a long youth. Is n't that a good plan to make on my twenty-first birthday?

Sir Lionel had n't forgotten, and wished me many happy returns of the day; but he did n't give me a present, so I hoped he had changed his mind. We got back to Salisbury about the time Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Senter were

having their breakfasts in bed (they had n't heard of our expedition, and the word had gone out that we were n't to start for the New Forest till after luncheon, as it would be a short run), and we had nearly finished our tea, toast, and eggs, when Dick strolled into the coffee-room. He seemed decidedly *intrigue* at sight of us together at a little table, talking cozily; and that detective look came into his eyes which cats have when a mouse occurs to them. He laughed merrily, though, and chaffed us on making "secret plans." Dick has n't a very nice laugh. It 's too explosive and loud. (Don't you think other animals must consider the laughter of humans an odd noise, without rhyme or reason?)

Also Dick has a nasty way of saying "thank you" to a waiter; with the rising inflection, you know, which is nicely calculated to make the servant feel himself the last of God's creatures.

By two o'clock we had said good-bye to Salisbury ("good-bye" for me, "au revoir" for the others, perhaps), and were kinematographing in and out of charming scenery, lovelier perhaps than any we 'd seen yet. Under green gloom of forests, where it seemed a prisoned dryad might be napping in each tree, and where only a faun could have been a suitable chauffeur; past heatherland, just lit to rosy fire by the sun's blaze; through billowy country where grain was gold and silver, meadows were "flawed emeralds set in copper," and here and there a huge dark blot meant a prehistoric barrow.

The car played us a trick for the first time, and Young Nick, looking more like Buddha than ever, got down to have a heart-to-heart talk with the motor. I think Apollo

had swallowed a crumb, or something, for he coughed and wheezed, and would n't move except with gasps, until he had been patted under the bonnet, and tickled with all sorts of funny instruments, such as a giant's dentist might use. It was fun, though, for us irresponsible ones, while Sir Lionel and Nick tried different things to get the crumb out of Apollo's throat. Other motorists flew by scornfully, like the Priest and the Levite, or slowed up to ask if they could help, and looked with some interest at Mrs. Senter and me, sitting there like mantelpiece ornaments. I did n't even want to slaughter them for the dust they made, now that I 'm a real motorist myself, for "dog cannot eat dog"; and even cyclists seemed like our poor relations.

One elderly woman bumped by, sitting in a kind of dreadful bath chair fastened in front of a motor bicycle, spattering noise and petrol. You could n't see her features under her expression, which was agonized. The young man who propelled her was smirking conceitedly, as if to say, "What a kind chap I am, giving my maiden aunt a good time!"

Presently a small car came limping along that had "We Know It" printed in large, rough letters on a card, tied to a broken wheel. Was n't that a good idea, when they 'd got nervous prostration having everybody tell them?

Cows paused, gazed at us, and sneered; but at last Apollo's crumb was extracted; Young Nick brushed the dust off his sleeves by rubbing his arms together, the way flies clean their antennæ, and we were ready to go on. "It 's a wise car that knows its own chauffeur," said Mrs. Senter.

Just because this happened, and because a tyre presently burst in sheer sympathy, we travelled in the beginning of sunset, which was divine. The scene swam in rose-coloured light, so pink it seemed as if you could bottle it, and it would still be pink. The tree trunks were cased in ruddy gold, like the gold leaf wrapped round royal mummies. Making up for lost time, the white road smoked beneath our tyres, and we were soon in the New Forest — the old, old New Forest, perfumed like the fore-court of heaven.

We came to this pretty little hotel, in the midst of heathery spaces like a cutting in the aromatic forest. I like my room, but I did n't want to stop in it and begin dressing for dinner. Looking out of my window, I saw a little white moon, curved like a baby's arm, cushioned among banks of sky azaleas, so I felt I must go out and drink the sunset. I had left too much of that rose-red wine in the bottom of the silver goblet. I must have the last drop!

So I ran downstairs; and I warn you, now comes the experience which I liked so much, but of which you won't approve.

The landlord stood in the hall, and I asked him if there were anything wonderful I could go and see in a few minutes. He smiled, and said it would n't take me very long to find Rufus's Stone, but he would not advise me to do it. I replied that I would n't ask him to advise, if he 'd point out the road, and probably I should only venture a little way. He was a nice man, so he went out in front of the hotel to point, and lent me a puppy as a companion.

The puppy was no respecter of persons. All he cared for was a walk, so he kindly consented to take me with him, gambolling ahead as if he knew where I wanted to go. That tempted me on, and the way was n't hard to find, for the puppy or for me. We played into each other's paws, and when I was lost he found me, or vice versa. The first thing I knew, there was the Stone. Nobody could mistake it, even from a distance; and going down to it from the top of a hill, it was still light enough to read the inscription.

This was my first entrance into the heart of fairyland.

William Rufus could n't have chosen a more ideal spot to die in, if he 'd picked it out himself from a list of a hundred others; and the evening silence under the great, gray beeches seemed as if it had lasted a thousand years, always the same, old and wise as Mother Earth. Then, suddenly, it was broken by the rustle and stir of a cock pheasant, which appeared from somewhere as if by magic, and stood for an instant all kingly, his breast blazing with jewelled orders in the sunset. Me he regarded with the haughty defiance of a Norman prince, and screamed with rage at the puppy, all his theories upset, because he had been so positive the world was entirely his. So it was, if he 'd only stopped to let me assure him that he owned all the best things in it; but he whirred and soared; and thus I realized instantly that he was a fairy in disguise. How stupid of me not to have guessed while he was there!

You know, the New Forest is haunted with fairies, good and bad. There are the "malfays" that came because of William the Conqueror's cruelty in driving away the peasants to make the great deer-forest for his hunting; and

"William Rufus couldn't have chosen a more ideal spot to die in"

there are the good fays that help the cottage housewives, and the "tricksies" that frighten the wild ponies and pinch the cattle. I would n't have been surprised to learn that that pheasant was Puck himself, for no doubt Puck has a hunting-lodge somewhere in the New Forest.

I meant to sit by the Stone only five minutes, but the fairies put a spell upon my five minutes, and the first thing I knew, the sun was gone. So was the puppy, which was even more serious, for I was handicapped by not knowing his name, and no self-respecting canine thing would respond to shouts of "dog," or "here, pup, pup, pup!"

However, I tried both, running about to look for him, here and there, among the enchanted bracken that rustled with elf-life, while the shadows came alive, and the rosy light died.

"Puppy, puppy!" I implored, helplessly drifting; and then, to my surprise — can you "find" that you 've *lost* a thing? Well, I don't know how else to express it. I found that I 'd lost the path. If I 'd only been able to remember whether the hotel were north or south, or east or west of Rufus's Stone, maybe it would have been all right; but does any normal girl ever give thought to points of the compass? I yelled a little more, hoping the puppy would be gentleman enough to come back to a lady in distress, and luckily Sir Lionel heard my howls. He 'd come out to look for me, on learning from the landlord that I 'd gone to Rufus's Stone, with the puppy, and he had met it — not the stone, but the puppy — looking sneaky and ashamed. Just then, my voice gave him an idea of my whereabouts, otherwise we should probably have missed; and if we had, I don't know what I *should* have done, so

you must n't scold at what happened next. Remember the New Forest is not a French pension full of old maids, but fairyland — fairyland.

He was in evening dress, without a hat, and I *was* pleased to see him, because I was beginning to be the tiniest bit afraid; and he did look so nice; and I was *so* glad he was n't Dick Burden. But don't worry! I did n't tell him that.

It seems he came downstairs rather early for dinner, and the landlord mentioned that I 'd gone out, so he strolled along, thinking to meet me after walking a few yards. When he did n't, he thought he 'd better keep on, because it was too late for me to be out of doors alone.

I was apologetic, and afraid it must be long past dinner-time; but he said I need n't mind that, as he had left word for the others not to wait after eight-fifteen.

Then in a few minutes I began to realize that we might have an adventure, because when I called, and Sir Lionel hurried on in quest of me, he 'd forgotten to notice the landmarks. It did seem ridiculous to have trouble in finding the way, so short a distance from the hotel; but you can't conceive how misleading it is in the New Forest. It 's like a part of the enchantment; and if we had been in the maze of the Minotaur, without Ariadne's clue, we could n't have been more bewildered than we soon found ourselves, tangled in the veil of twilight.

"I wonder if birds will cover us with leaves?" I said, laughing, when we had made up our minds that we were lost. But it seemed more likely that, if any creature paid us this thoughtful attention, it would be bats. As night fell in the Forest, they unhooked themselves from their

mysterious trapezes, and whirred past our faces with a soft flap, flap of velvet wings. I don't know what I should have done if one had made a halfway-house of my hair!

"Are you hungry?" Sir Lionel wanted to know.

I said that I was, but would n't harrow him up by explaining that I was ravenous.

He did n't appear even to *want* to scold, though it would have been easy to hint politely that it would be my own fault if we did n't get any dinner that night — or, perhaps, breakfast next morning. Instead of being cross with me, he blamed himself for being stupid enough to lose me. I exonerated him, and we were extremely nice to each other; but as we walked on and on, round and round, seeing no lights anywhere, or hearing anything except that wonderful sound of a great silence, I began to grow tired. I did n't mean, though, that he should see it. *I* had enough to be ashamed of, without that, but he knew by instinct, and took my hand to draw it through his arm, telling me to lean as heavily as I liked. I held back at first, saying it was n't necessary; and insisting, as I pulled away, his hand closed down on mine tightly. It was only for a second or two, because I gave up at once, and let him lay my hand on his arm as he wished. But, do you know, mother, I think I ought to tell you it felt quite differently from any other hand that ever touched mine.

Of course I have n't even shaken hands with many men since I 've been grown up, though if you 'd let me be a singer I should n't have thought any more about it than if I were President of the United States. One reads in novels of "the electricity in a touch," and all that: but

there it generally means that you 're falling in love. And I can't possibly be falling in love with Ellaline's Dragon, can I? I don't suppose that can be. It would be too stupid, and forward, and altogether unspeakable. But really, I do feel differently about him from any way I ever felt before toward anybody. I have always said that I 'd rather be alone with myself than with anyone else except you, for any length of time, because I 'm such good chums with myself, and enjoy thinking my own thoughts. But I *do* like being with Sir Lionel. I feel excited and eager at the thought of being with him. And his fingers on mine — and my hand on his arm — and the touch of his sleeve — and a faint little, almost imperceptible scent of Egyptian cigarettes mixing with the woodsy smell of the night — oh, I don't know how to describe it to myself. So now you know as much as I do. But would n't it be dreadful if I should go and fall in love with Sir Lionel Pendragon of all other men in the world? In a few more weeks I shall be slipping out of his life forever; and not only that, but I shall be leaving a very evil memory behind. He will despise me. I shall have proved myself exactly the sort of person he abominates.

I did n't think all that, however, as he put my hand on his arm. I just felt the thrill of it; but instead of worrying, I was happy, and did n't care how tired and hungry I was, or whether we ever got anywhere or not. As for him, he was too polite to let me know he was bored, and all the time we were looking for the hotel the night was so beautiful, so wonderful, that we could n't help talking of exquisite things, telling each other thoughts neither of us would have spoken aloud in daylight. It was quite

dark now, except for a kind of rosy quivering of light along the horizon, and the stars that had come out like a bright army of fairies, with millions of scintillating spears.

I knew then, dearest, that he was no dragon, no matter what circumstantial evidence may have been handed down to Ellaline as a legacy from her dead mother. That is something to have divined by the magic of the forest, is n't it, after I 've been puzzling so long? There is now not the least doubt in my mind. So if I should be silly and sentimental enough to fancy myself in love, it can't do any harm, except to make me a little sorry and sad after I 've come home to you. It won't be anything to be *ashamed* of, to have cared about a man like Sir Lionel; because I assure you I shan't behave foolishly, no matter how I may eventually feel. You can trust your Audrie for that.

It was too dark to tell the time by a watch, but we remarked to each other that they must have finished dinner long ago; and Sir Lionel hoped this would n't spoil the memory of my birthday for me.

"Oh, no," said I, before I thought, "it will make it better. I shall never, never forget this."

"Nor I," said he, in a pleasant, quiet tone.

Then he went on to tell me that he had a little birthday remembrance which all day he 'd been wanting to give me. It was a ruby ring, because the ruby was July's stone, but I need n't wear it unless I liked. He hoped I would n't mind his having disobeyed me when I said I wanted nothing, because he wished very much to give it to me. And having lived alone, and ordered his own and other people's affairs for so long, had accustomed him to having

his own way. Would I be kind to him, and accept his present?

I could n't say no, under those stars and in that enchantment. So I answered that I would take the ring — knowing all the while I must soon hand it over to Ellaline.

"Shall I give it to you now?" he asked, "or will you wait till to-morrow?"

I did want to see it, though it was to be only borrowed! "Now," said I. Then he took a ring from some pocket, and tried to slip it over a finger of the hand on his arm.

"Oh, but that 's the engaged finger," I burst out.

Silly of me! I might have let him put it on, and changed it afterward.

"I beg your pardon," said he, almost as if he were startled. "That will be a younger man's privilege some day, and then you will be taken away from me."

"You will be glad to get rid of me, I should think," I hurried to say, stretching out my other hand, and letting him slip the ring on the third finger.

"Should you think so?" he echoed. "I suppose you have the right to feel that, after the past. But don't feel it. Don't, child."

That was all, and I did n't answer. I could n't; for what he had said was for Ellaline, not for me. Yet it made my heart beat, his voice was so sincere, and fuller of emotion than I 'd ever heard it yet.

Just then, into our darkness a light seemed to flash. We both saw it together. I thought it might be the hotel, but Sir Lionel said he feared it was more probably the window of some remote cottage or charcoal-burner's hut.

We walked toward it, and that was what it was: a

charcoal-burner's hut. Sir Lionel must have been disappointed, because he wanted to get me home, but *I* was n't. I was in such a mood that I was not ready for the adventure to come to an end.

The next bit of the adventure was exactly suited to the New Forest, and we could n't have experienced it anywhere else.

The hut was a tiny, wattled shed, and the light we 'd seen came through the low, open doorway. It was the light of a fire and a candle; and there was a delicious aromatic smell of wood smoke in the air. Sir Lionel explained, as we walked up to the place, that some of these huts were hundreds of years old, remnants of the time when debtors and robbers and criminals of all sorts used to hide in the forest under the protection of the malfays. As he spoke, we almost stumbled over some obstacle in the dark, and he said that very likely it was the hearth of a vanished cottage. People had the right to leave the hearth if their house were torn down, to establish "cottage rights"; and there were a good many such, still scattered through the forest, even in the gardens of modern houses; for no one dared take them away.

The charcoal-burner was "at home," and receiving. He was engaged in cooking eggs and bacon for his supper, and if you could only guess how good they smelled! Nothing smells as nice as eggs and bacon when you are hungry, and we were ravenous.

Most things as old as that charcoal-burner are in museums; and his eyes were so close together it seemed as if they might run into one when he winked. Also, he was deaf, so we had to roar to him, before he could understand

what had happened. When he did understand, though, he was a thorough trump, and said we could have his supper if we "would be pleased to eat it." Bread and cheese would do for him. And we might have tea, if we could take it without milk.

But there were three eggs, and three strips of bacon, so we insisted that we must share and share alike, or we would have nothing. I made the tea, in a battered tin pot which looked like an heirloom, and we all sat at an uncovered kitchen table together, though our host protested. It was fun; and the old thing told us weird tales of the forest which made me conscious that I have a spine and marrow, just as certain wild music does. His name is Purkess; he thinks he is descended from Purkess, the charcoal-burner who found the body of William Rufus; and his ancestors, some of whom were smugglers and poachers, have lived in the forest for a thousand years. He was so old that he could remember as a child hearing his old grandfather tell of the days of the wicked, illegal timber-selling in the forest for the building of warships. Just think, grand oaks, ash and thorn, trees stanch as English hearts, sold for the price of firewood!

I sat at the table, watching the firelight play on my ring, which I had n't seen till we got into the hut; and it is beautiful. I shall enjoy having it, though only for a little while, and shall regard it as a trust for Ellaline.

The charcoal-burner assured us we need n't worry; he would put us on the way home, and give us landmarks which, after he 'd guided us a certain distance, we could n't miss even at night.

When we 'd finished our eggs and bacon, our tea and

chunks of dry bread, Sir Lionel laid a gold piece on the table. Blind as he was, the old man was n't too blind to see *that*, and he simply beamed.

"Bless you all the days of your life, sir, and your good, pretty lady!" he cackled.

That 's the third time I 've been taken for Sir Lionel's wife. The other times I did n't care, but this time, though I laughed, it was a *put on* laugh, because of those dim questionings about myself floating in the background of my mind.

The descendant of poachers knew the forest, as he said, "with his eyes shut." He limped before us for nearly half a mile, along what he called a "walk" — a New Forest word — and then abandoned us to our fate, after describing the profile of each important tree which we must pass, and pointing out a few stars as guides. Then we bade each other good-bye for ever. He went back to gloat over his gold piece, and Sir Lionel and I went on together.

Somehow, we fell to talking of our favourite virtues, and without thinking, I said, "My mother's is gratitude."

"Gratitude," he repeated, as if in surprise, but he did n't seem to notice that I 'd used the present tense. To make him forget my slip, I hurried on to say I thought mine was courage, in a man, anyhow. What was his, in a woman?

"Truth," he answered, with an instant's hesitation.

Luckily he could n't see me blush in the dark. But the real Audrie was always decently truthful, was n't she? It 's only this Ellaline-Audrie that is n't free to be true.

"Only in women?" I asked, uncomfortably.

"Truth goes without saying in men — the sort of men one knows," said he.

"Don't you think women love the truth as much as men?" I persisted.

"No, I don't," he answered abruptly. Then qualified his "no," as if he ought to apologize for it. "But I have n't had much experience," he finished, a heavy, dull sound coming into his voice.

Well, dearest, that 's all I have to tell you on this, my birthday night, Except that we found our way back to the hotel safely, arriving about half-past ten, and only Emily was anxious about us. The other two were inclined to be frivolous; and Mrs. Senter noticed the new ring, which I had forgotten to take off my finger. Nothing ever escapes her eyes! I saw them light, and linger, but of course she did n't refer to the ring, and naturally I did n't.

I had n't quite decided whether or not I should wear it "for every day," and had been inclined to think it would be better not, even at the risk of disappointing the giver. But I made up my mind, when Mrs. Senter looked so peculiarly at it, that I would brazen the thing out, and so I will.

"I envy you your adventure," she said, in what *I* felt was a meaning voice, though Sir Lionel did n't appear to read under the commonplace surface.

I don't care if she does choose to be horrid. I don't see how she can hurt me. And as for Dick, he has done his worst. He has made me get them both asked for the tour. I should think that 's enough.

We are going to stop at the Compton Arms for two or

three days, running about in the car to see different parts of the forest, and coming "home" at night. I love that way!

The only thing I don't like in going from one hotel to another, is having all sorts of queer little birthmarks on my hankies and other things in the wash. Good-bye, Angel Duck.

Your Grown-up
DAUGHTER.

Only think, I am now of age!

By the way, Sir Lionel, who expected his ward to be a little girl (thoughtless of him!), said to-night: "You 're so old, I can't get used to you."

And I retorted, "You 're so young, I can't get used to *you*."

I hope it did n't sound pert, to answer like that?

XIII

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Lulworth Cove, July 30th

Why are n't you with me, dearest, seeing what I am seeing?

It 's all very well for you to write that my letters make a panorama pass before your eyes, and I 'm flattered, but I want you. Although I am enjoying life, I 'm more excited than happy, and I don't sleep well. I dream horrid dreams about Mrs. Senter and Dick Burden, and about Ellaline, too, but I always laugh when I wake up.

Thank you so much for telling me that you think I 'm behaving pretty well, considering. But I wonder what you 'll say in your next, after my last?

Every day since then I 've been meaning to write, if only a short note, but we 've had early starts and late stops; and then, from not sleeping at night, I 'm often so tired when the end of the day comes that I feel too stupid to try and earn your compliments.

It is morning, and I 'm writing out of doors, sitting on a rock, close by the sea. But before I begin to describe Lulworth, I must tell you a little about the glorious things of which I 've had flying glimpses since the letter dated Compton Arms. This is our first all-night stopping place

since we left Stony Cross "for good," but I 've picked up many a marvellous memory by the way.

People who have n't seen the New Forest have n't seen England.

I had no idea what it was like till we stayed there. I knew from guide-books that there were thousands of acres of woodland still, though much had been "deforested"; but I did n't know it hid many beautiful villages, and even towns. It 's a heavenly place for motoring, but I 'm not sure it would n't be even better to walk, because you could eke out the joy of it longer. I should like a walking honeymoon (a whole round moon) in the New Forest — if it were with just the right man.

Oh, I must n't forget to say I 'm glad I did n't see Rufus's Stone by daylight. Mrs. Senter and Dick went the morning after I wrote to you, but I would n't go again, because I did n't want to lose the enchanted picture in my mind. She laughed when I refused. I could have slapped her. But never mind.

When they came back they were disgusted, and said there was a ginger-beer woman and a man with the game of "Aunt Sally," and a crowd of cockney excursionists round them and the Stone. Talk of malfays!

Sir Lionel had made out an itinerary for the day, and we were to start for Lyndhurst, Beaulieu Abbey, Lymington, Brockenhurst, and Mark Ash, all of which we were to visit before evening, coming back by way of Lyndhurst again, and stopping there for tea. But before we got off, such a comic thing happened.

I did n't think to mention it in a letter, but one day we passed a motor-car that was having tyre trouble by the side

of the road. The chauffeur was rolling on a new tyre, with a curious-looking machine, in which Young Nick was passionately interested, as he 'd never seen one before. Sir Lionel explained that it was an American tool, not very long invented, and said to be good. He added, in an evil moment, that he wished he 'd thought to buy one like it before leaving London, as probably the thing could n't be got in the Provinces.

Well, just as we were about to spin away in great style from the Compton Arms, one of our tyres sighed, and settled down for an unearned rest. But instead of looking black-browed and murderous, as he did when the same thing occurred before, Nick smiled gleefully. He jumped down, and without a word produced a machine exactly like the one his master admired a few days ago.

"Where did you get that?" asked Sir Lionel.

"Last night, sahib," returned Nick, imperturbably. (He can speak quite good English.)

"What! Since we had our trouble?"

"Yes, sahib." An odd expression now began to play among Nick's brown features, like a breeze over a field of growing wheat.

"How's that? There 's no shop."

"The sahib says true. I found this thing."

"Where?" sharply.

"But a little way from here. In the road."

"You rascal," exclaimed Sir Lionel. "You stole it."

Young Nick made Buddha eyebrows and a Buddha gesture. "The sahib knows all. But if I did take it? Those men, they were going again to the big city. We

away. They never miss this. They buy another. It is better we have it."

Trying to look very angry, though I knew he was dying to laugh, Sir Lionel reproached Nick for breaking a solemn promise. "You swore you 'd never do such a thing in England if I brought you with me. Now you 've begun again, the same old game. I shall have to send you back, that is all."

"Then I die, and *that* is all," replied Young Nick, calmly.

The end of the story is, that Sir Lionel found out the names of the men, who had spent the night at the Compton Arms, and had written their address in the visitors' book. He sent the tool to them, with an explanation which I should have loved to read. And it appears that, though Nick is honest personally, he is a thief for the car, and in Bengal took anything new and nice which other motors had and his had n't.

Now, Mrs. Norton is afraid that, if Sir Lionel scolds him much, he will commit hari-kari on the threshold of the hotel, which would be embarrassing. And it does no good to tell her that hari-kari is a Japanese or Chinese trick. She says, if Nick would not do that he might do something worse.

Gliding over the perfect roads of the Forest, Apollo seemed actually to float. I never felt anything so delicious, and so like being a goddess reclining on a wind-blown cloud. No wonder motorists' faces, when you can see them, almost always look madly happy. So different from "hay motorists," as The Blot says. *They* generally look grumpy.

The little wild ponies were one of the Forest's surprises for me. We met lots of them, mostly miniature mothers giving their innocent-faced, rough babies an airing; delightful beastkins. And I almost liked Mrs. Senter for having a cousin who owns one of these ponies as a pet, a dwarf one, no bigger than a St. Bernard dog. It wears a collar with silver bells, follows her everywhere, thinks nothing of curling up on a drawing-room sofa, and once was found on its mistress's bed, asleep on a new Paris hat.

The enticing rose-bowered cottages we passed ought to have told me that we were back in Hampshire again, if the New Forest had n't seemed to a poor little foreigner like a separate county all by itself. It would be no credit to a bride to clamour for love in such a cottage, and turn up her nose at palaces. She might be married at the beautiful church of Lyndhurst (a most immediate jewel of a church, with an exquisite altar-piece by Lord Leighton, a Flaxman, and a startlingly fine piece of sculpture by an artist named Cockerell), then, safely wedded, plunge with her bridegroom into the Forest, and be perfectly happy without ever coming out again. I wish I had had the "Forest Lovers" to re-read while we were there. I think Maurice Hewlett must have got part of his inspiration in those mysterious green "walks" which lead away into that land where fairy lore and historic legend go hand in hand.

Lyndhurst, which King George III. loved, is pretty, but we did n't stop to look at it, because we were coming back that way. After seeing the church which, though modern, I would n't have missed for a great deal, we spun on to Beaulieu Abbey, the home of a hero of motoring. There we saw a perfect house, rising among trees, and

sharing with the sky a clear sheet of water as a mirror. Once this was a guest-house for the Abbey; now it 's called the Palace House, and deserves its name. Its looking-glass is really only a long creek, which spills out of the Solent, but it seems like a lake; and you 've only to walk along a meadow path to the refectory of the old abbey. From there you go through a mysterious door into the ruined cloisters, which used to belong to the Cistercians — the "White Monks." King John provided money for the building; which proves that it 's an ill wind which blows no one any good, because the stingy, tyrannical old king would n't have given a penny to the abbots if they had n't scourged him in a nightmare he had. I shan't soon forget the magnolia and the myrtle in the quadrangle, and if I were one of the long-vanished monks, I should haunt the place. There could n't be a lovelier one.

From Beaulieu we went to Lymington, a quaint and ancient town, with a picturesque port. Everything there looked happy and sleepy, except the postillions on the Bournemouth coach, which was stopping at the hotel where we had an early lunch. They were wide awake and jolly, under their old-fashioned, broad-brimmed beaver hats.

After Lymington, we skimmed through the Forest, hardly knowing or caring whither, though we did manage to find Brockenhurst, and Mark Ash, which was almost the finest of all with its glorious trees. Our one wish was to avoid highways, and Sir Lionel was clever about that. The sweetest bit was a mere by-path, hardly to be called a road, though the surface was superb. Young Nick had to get down and open a gate, which led into what seemed a private place, and no one who had n't been

told to go that way would have thought of it. On the other side of the gate it was just another part of forest fairyland, whose inhabitants turned themselves into trees as we, in our motor-car, intruded on them. I never saw such extraordinary imitations of the evergreen family as they contrived on the spur of the moment. It was a glamorous wood, and throughout the whole forest I had more and more the feeling that England is n't so small as it 's painted. There are such vast spaces not lived in at all, yet haunted with legend and history. One place we passed — hardly a place, it was so small — was called Tyrrel's Ford; and there Sir Walter Tyrrel is said to have stopped to have his horse's shoes reversed by a blacksmith, on his flight to the sea, after killing the Red King. Or no, now I remember, this was next day, between Ringwood and Christchurch!

When we were having tea at Lyndhurst on our way back, at a hotel like a country house in a great garden, we found out that it once had been the home of your forty-second cousin, the Duc de Stacpoole, who came to England with Louis Philippe. There 's his beautiful tapestry, to this day, in the dining-room, and his gorgeous magnolia tree looking wistfully into the window, as if asking why he is n't there to admire its creamy flowers, big as fat snowballs.

On our way home the rabbits of the New Forest were having a party, and were annoyed with us for coming to it without invitations. They kept "crossing our path" as people in melodramas say, so that we had to go slowly, not to run over them, and sometimes they galloped ahead, just in front of us, exactly in the middle of the road, so that

we could n't pass them. Dick kept longing to "pot" at the poor little pets, but Sir Lionel said he had lived out of England long enough to find a good deal of pleasure in life without taking that of any other creature. That is n't a very dragonish sentiment, is it?

Next day we had a delicious run (there 's no other adjective which quite expresses it) through Ringwood, which is a door of the Forest, to Christchurch, another Abbey — (no, it 's a Priory; but to me that 's a detail) which stands looking at its own beauty in a crystal mirror. It 's Augustan, not Cistercian, like Beaulieu; and it 's august, as well; very noble; finer to see than many a cathedral. You and I, in other lands, have industriously travelled many miles to visit churches without half as many "features" as Christchurch. One of its quaintest is a leper's window; and a few of the beauties are the north transept, with unique "hatchet" ornamentation; a choir with wonderful old oak carvings — and the tomb of the Countess of Salisbury, of whom you read aloud to me when I was small, in a book called "Some Heroines of History." She came last in the volume because she was only a countess, and not a queen, but I cried when she said she did n't mind being killed, only being touched by a horrid, common axe, and wanted them to cut off her head with a sword. There are lots of other beautiful things in the church, too, and a nice legend about an oak beam which grew long in the night, and building materials which came down from a hill of their own accord, because one of the builders was Christ himself. That 's why they named it Christchurch, you see, instead of Twyneham, as it would otherwise have been.

We stopped only long enough, after we had seen the Priory, to pay our respects to a splendid old Norman house near by, and then dashed away toward Boscombe and Bournemouth, which reminded me a little of Baden-Baden, with its gardens and fountains and running waters; its charming trees and exciting-looking shops. Just because it 's modern, we did n't pause, but swept on, through scenery which suddenly degenerated. However, as I heard Sir Lionel say to Mrs. Senter: "You can't go far in this country without finding beauty"; and presently she was her own lovely self again, fair as Nature intended her to be. I mean England, not Mrs. Senter, who is lovelier than Nature made her.

We ran through miles of dense pine forests, where rhododendrons grew wild; where gulls spread silver wings and trailed coral feet a few yards above our heads; and the tang of the sea mingled with pine-balsam in our nostrils.

Soon after dull, but historic Wareham we came quite into the heart of Thomas Hardy's country. Scarcely had we turned our backs on Wareham (which I was n't sorry to do), when I cried out at something on a distant height — something which was like a background in a mediæval picture. It was Corfe Castle, of which I 'd been thinking ever since Amesbury, because of the wicked Elfrida; but the glimpse was delusive, for the dark shape hid in a moment, and we did n't see it again for a long time — not until our curving road ran along underneath the castle's towering hill. Then it soared up with imposing effect, giving an impression of grisly strength which was heightened the nearer we approached. Distance lends no

enchantment to Corfe, for the castle dominates the dour, gray town that huddles round it, and is never nobler than when you tap for admittance at its gates.

I tried to think, as we waited to go in, how young Edward felt — Edward the Martyr — when he stood at the gates, waiting to go in and visit his half-brother whom he loved, and his step-mother Elfrida, whom he hated. He never left the castle alive, poor boy! Afterward, in the ruins, I went to the window where Elfrida was supposed to have watched the young king's coming, before she ran down to the gates and directed the murder which was planned to give her own son the kingdom. It made the story seem almost too realistic, because, as you often tell me, my imagination carries me too fast and too far. There 's nothing easier than to send it back ten or twelve centuries in the same number of minutes — and it 's such a cheap way of travelling, too!

Corfe is in Dorset, you must know, a county as different from others as I am different from the real Ellaline Lethbridge, and the castle is at the very centre of the Isle of Purbeck, which makes it seem even more romantic than it would otherwise. I 'm afraid it was n't really even begun in the days of Elfrida, or "Ælfrith," who had only a hunting lodge there; but if people *will* point out her window, am I to blame if I try to make firm belief attract shy facts? Besides, facts are such dull dogs in the historical kennels until they 've been taught a few tricks.

Anyhow, Corfe is Norman, at worst, and not only did King John keep much treasure there, but one supposes there 's some hidden still. If I could only have found it, I 'd be buying a castle for you and me to live in. Sir

Lionel thinks that I, as his ward, will live in his castle; and he was telling me at Corfe about the Norman tower at Graylees. But, alas, I knew better. Oh, I did n't mean that "alas"! Consider it erased; and the other silly things I wrote you the other night, please. They 're all so *useless*.

There were loads of interesting prisoners in Corfe Castle, at one time or another, knights from France, and fair ladies, the fairest of all, the beautiful "Damsel of Brittany," who had claims to the English crown. And kings have visited there; and in Cromwell's day a lady and her daughters successfully defended it in a great siege. It was such a splendid and brave defence that it seems sad, even to this day, to think how the castle fell after all, a year later, and to see the great stones and masses of masonry lying, far below the height, exactly where they rolled when Parliament ordered the conquered towers to be blown up by gunpowder. The Bankes family, who still own Corfe, must be proud of that Lady Bankes, their ancestress, who held the castle. And is n't it nice, the Bankes still have the old keys, where they live, at Kingston Lacy?

You like Thomas Hardy's "Hand of Ethelberta" next to "Far from the Madding Crowd." Well, Coomb Castle in that book is really Corfe Castle. I told you we were in Hardy country. After Wareham, and not very far away, at Wool, is an old, old manor-house of the Turbervilles, turned into a farmhouse now. You don't need to be reminded of what Hardy made of that, I know.

We lunched at an interesting old inn, like all the rest of the ancient houses of Corfe, slate-roofed, grim and gray.

Then we coasted down the steep hill to the plain again, making for Swanage. It was dusty, but we were n't sorry, because, just when we were travelling rather fast, on a perfectly clear road, a policeman popped out like a Jack-in-the-Box, apparently from nowhere. You could tell by his face he was a "trappist," as Dick calls the motor-spies, and though Sir Lionel was n't really going beyond the legal limit, he glared at our number as if he meant mischief. But that number-plate had thoughtfully masked itself in dust, so with all the will in the world he could work us no harm after our backs were turned. Once in a while it does seem as if Nature sympathized with the poor, maligned motorist whom nobody loves, and is willing to throw her protection over him. It would be like tempting Providence to polish off dust or mud, in such circumstances, would n't it?

My face was a different matter, though, and I longed to polish it. Before we got to Swanage, it felt — even under chiffon — just as an iced cake must feel. Only the cake, fortunately for its contour, never needs to smile.

We were going to Swanage because of the caves — Tilly Whim Caves. Did you ever hear of them, Parisienne mamma? Small blame to you, if not, because one can't know everything; but they are worth seeing; and the Swanage harbour is a little dream. The town is good, too. Old-world, and very, very respectable-looking, as if it were full of long-established lawyers and clergymen, yet not dull, like Wareham, which was important in Saxon days, long before Swanage was born or thought of. It 's "Knollsea" in the "Hand of Ethelberta." Do you remember? And Alfred the

Great had a victory close by — so close, that in a storm the Danish ships blew into what is the town now, as if they had been butterflies with their wings wet.

We climbed up, up above the village, in the motor-car, on the steepest, twistingest road I 've seen yet in England, though Sir Lionel says I 'll think nothing of it when we get into Devonshire; up, up to a high place where they 've built a restaurant. Near by we left the motor (and Emily, who never walks for pleasure), and ho, for the caves! It was a scramble among dark cliffs of Purbeck limestone. The caves are delightfully weird, and of course there are smuggling stories about them. A strange wind blew through their labyrinths, ceaselessly, like the breathings of a hidden giant, betrayed by sleep. It was heavenly cool in that dim twilight that never knew sun, but oh, it was hot coming out into the afternoon glare, and climbing the steep path to where the motor waited! I think Mrs. Senter was sorry she had n't stopped with Emily. She got a horrid headache, and felt so ill that Sir Lionel asked if she would care to stop all night at Swanage, and she said she would.

Fortunately, it turned out that there were good hotels, and Sir Lionel took rooms at the one we liked the best — old-fashioned in an agreeable way. Mrs. Senter went to bed, but the rest of us strolled out after dinner; and Mrs. Norton began talking to Dick about his mother, which threw Sir Lionel and me together.

We sat on the pier, where the moon turned bright pink as she dipped down into a bank of clouds like a rose-garden growing out of the sea. And even when it was dark, the sea kept its colour, the deep blue of sapphires,

where, at a distance, little white yachts and sailboats looked like a company of crescent moons floating in an azure sky. I felt in the sweetest mood, kind toward all the world, and particularly to Sir Lionel. I could n't bear to remember that I 'd ever had bad thoughts, and doubts, so I was half sub-consciously nicer to him than I ever was before. Dick kept glaring at me, from his seat beside Mrs. Norton, and drawing his eyebrows together when he thought Sir Lionel was n't looking. Going home, he got a chance for a few words, when Emily was speaking to her brother about Mrs. Senter's headache. He said that there was something he must say to me, alone, and he wanted me to come out into the garden behind the hotel, to talk to him when the others had gone to bed, but of course I refused. Then he said, would I manage to give him a few minutes next day, and intimated, gently, that I 'd be sorry if I did n't. I told him that "I 'd see"; which is always a safe answer; but I have n't "managed" yet.

When I got back to my room at the hotel I noticed that some of my things were n't in the places where I 'd left them; and the writing portfolio in a dressing-case which Sir Lionel *thinks* is mine, but is really Ellaline's (one of the Bond Street purchases), had my papers changed about in it. The servants in the house seemed so respectable and nice, I can't think that one of them would have pried. And yet — well, the truth is, I 'm afraid of being catty, but I can't help putting Mrs. Senter's headache and my disturbed papers together in my mind. Two and two when put together, make four, you know. And her room in the Swanage hotel was next to mine.

She might have been sure that we 'd all go out after dinner on such a perfect night. But why should she bother? Unless Dick has told her something, after all? I suppose I shall never know whether it was she or someone else who meddled. I looked through all the papers and other things, but could find nothing "compromising," as the adventuresses say. However, I can't quite remember what I had. Some letter may have been taken. I have been a tiny bit worried since, for you know Ellaline would never forgive me if anything should go wrong now. And I 've been thinking that, though Sir Lionel is no dragon, there may be something about Honoré du Guesclin which he would n't approve. Ellaline may even have her own reasons for thinking he would n't approve, dragon or no dragon. Very likely she did n't tell me everything — she was so anxious to have her own way.

But to go back to the journey here. Almost each mile we travelled gave us some thought of Hardy, and acquainted me with the character of Dorset, which is just what I expected from his books: giant trees; tall, secretive hedges; high brick walls, mellow with age and curtained with ivy; stone cottages, solid and prosperous and old, with queer little bay-windows, diamond-paned; Purbeck granite bursting through the grass of meadows, and making a grave background for brilliant flowers; heaths that Hardy wrote about in the "Return of the Native" — heaths, heaths, and rolling downs.

We took the way from Swanage to West Lulworth, and had an adventure on a hill. Sir Lionel is very strict with his little Buddha about examining everything that could

possibly go wrong with the motor, and just before we started, I heard him ask Young Nick if he had looked at the brakes after our descent from Tilly Whim. "Oh, yes, sahib," said the brown image. "Oh, no!" said the brakes themselves, on a big hill, as far from the madding crowd as "Gabriel" and "Bathsheba" ever lived. We 'd got lost, and that was the way the car punished us. First of all, the motor refused to work. That made Apollo feel faint, so that he began to run backward down the hill instead of going up; and when Sir Lionel put on the brakes, they would n't act.

It was the first time anything really bad had happened, and my heart gave a jump, but somehow I was n't frightened. With Sir Lionel driving, it seemed as if no harm could come; and it did n't, for he steered to the side of the road, and brought the car up short against a great hummock of grass. All the same, we nearly tipped over, and Sir Lionel told us to jump. I should n't have stirred if he hadn't spoken. I should have awaited orders; but the others were moving before we stopped, and Mrs. Senter fell down and bumped her knee. That made her hair come partly undone, and, to my horror, a bunch of the dearest little curls, which I always thought lived there, were loosened. There was a great wind blowing, and in a second more the curls would have been on the horizon, if I had n't seized them just as they were about to take flight. If they 'd gone, they must have passed almost in front of Sir Lionel's nose, on their way. Would n't that have been dreadful? I should think she could never have looked him in the face again, for her hair 's her greatest beauty, and she 's continually saying things about its

being all her own, and having more than she knows what to do with.

But luckily his back was turned when I caught the curls, and stuffed them hastily into her hand before she was on her feet, nobody seeing except Dick. I suppose a nephew does n't count! But do you know, dear, if they 'd been my curls, I believe she 'd have loved Sir Lionel to see them. I don't like her a bit, but all the more I could n't be mean. I reserve all my cattyness toward her for my letters to you, when I let myself go, and stretch my little nails in my velvet paw.

I was sorry for Young Nick! He was miserably sheepish, and vowed that he really had examined the brakes. Sir Lionel just looked at him, and raised his eyebrows; that was all, because he would n't scold the poor little wretch before us.

It was as much as the three men could do to get Apollo down on his four tyres again, for, though he seemed as lightly balanced as an eccentric dancer trying to touch one eyelid to the floor, he was partly embedded in the bank by the roadside. Then we all sat gracefully about, while Sir Lionel and the chauffeur worked —Young Nick under the car, looking sometimes like a contortionist tying himself into lover's knots, sometimes like a miniature Michelangelo lying on his back to paint a fresco. I hope, though, that Michael never had half the trouble finding his paints and brushes that Nick had to get at his tommies and jemmies, and dozens of strange little instruments. He lay with his mouth bristling with giant pins, and had the air of a conscientious dentist filling a difficult tooth.

It was a long time before the brakes were properly tightened up and the four cylinders breathing freely again; but it would have been ungracious to be bored in such a glorious wild place, in such glorious weather. There was a kind of Walt Whitman feeling in the air that made me want to sing; and finally I could resist no longer. I burst out with those verses of his which you set to music for me. At least, I sang a few bars; and you ought to have seen Sir Lionel wheel round and look at me when he heard my voice. I never said anything to him about knowing how to sing, so he was surprised.

"Why, you have quite a pretty voice, Ellaline!" said Mrs. Norton.

"'Quite a pretty voice!' I should say she had!" remarked Sir Lionel. He did n't say any more. But I never had a compliment I liked better; and I did n't mind a bit when Mrs. Senter remarked that anyone would fancy I was a professional.

I was almost sorry to go on at last, though Emily was worrying lest we should get no lunch. But we saw beautiful things as we spun toward Lulworth, rushing so swiftly along an empty road that the hedges roared past us like dark cataracts. It was thrilling, and showed what Apollo could do when he chose. If there had been a soul on the road, of course we would n't have done such deeds; though I must say, from what I 've seen, if you creep along so as not to kick up a dust and annoy people, they aren't at all grateful, but only scorn instead of hating you, and think you can't go faster, or you would. Still, you have the consciousness of innocence. One thing

we saw was a delightful Tudor house, called Creech Grange; and the ancestor of the man who owns it built Bond Street. I 'm sure I don't know why, but I 'm glad he did. We took the valley way on purpose to see the Grange, instead of going over Ring Hill and other windy heights, but it was worth the sacrifice.

Lulworth Castle, which we passed, is rather like Graylees, Sir Lionel said; so now I wish more than ever that I could see Graylees, for Lulworth is fine and feudal. But I shall have burst like a bubble before the time comes for Graylees.

There! I have brought you with us to Lulworth Cove, at last — the adorable little place where, at this moment, as I told you at the beginning of my letter, I 'm sitting on the beach among red and green fishing boats.

You would n't dream of Lulworth's existence until it suddenly breaks on you, and you see the blue bay lying asleep in the arms of giant rocks, which appear to have had a violent convulsion without disturbing the baby sheet of water. I suppose they were angry with the world for finding out their secret; for it has found out, and loves to come to Lulworth Cove. However, the place contrives to *look* as unknown as ever, as if only some lazy gulls and a few fishermen mending lobster-pots had ever heard a hint of it. There 's a narrow street; a few pretty old cottages; a comfortable hotel where we had crabs, divine though devilled, and *omelette au rhum* floating in flames of the blue I should like my eyes to be when angry; there 's a post-office, and — nothing else that I can think of, except circling hills, a golden sweep of beach, and sea

of ethereal azure creaming against contorted rocks. That 's all; but it 's a little Paradise, and ——

Night, of the same day.

Just there I was interrupted. Dick Burden came, and I had to listen to him, unless I wanted a scene. I could n't appeal to any nice brown fisherman to please feed him to the lobsters, so I sat still and let him talk. He said that he was awfully in love with me. A charming fashion he 's taken to show it, has n't he? As I remarked to him.

He replied in the old, old way, about all being fair, etc., etc. I asked him which it was, love or war, and he said it was both. He knew I was n't in love (I should think not, indeed!), but he wanted me to promise to be engaged to him from now on.

"I won't," said I — short and sudden, like that.

"You 'll jolly well have to," said he. Then he proceeded to warn me that if I did n't, my friend Miss Ellaline Lethbridge must look out for herself, because I would no longer be in a position to guard her interests.

I mentioned that he was a perfect beast, and he said it might be true, but I was a deceiver, and it was not good taste for the pot to call the kettle black.

"I 'd rather go into the kind of convent where one 's not allowed to speak a word all one's life, except '*Memento mori*,' than marry you," said I, politely.

But it seemed that he was n't thinking so much about being married, as just being engaged. As to marrying, we were both very young, and he would wait for me till we could afford to marry, which might n't be for some time

yet, he explained. What he was keen on beginning at once, was being engaged.

"Why?" I asked, savagely.

"Because I don't want anyone else to think he has a chance. That 's the plain truth," said Dick, in the most brazen way.

That staggered me; for he was glaring straight into my eyes in such a meaning way I could n't help understanding *who* was in his mind. So utterly *ridiculous!* As if the person he meant would ever think of me! And Dick used to say himself that Sir Lionel Pendragon took no interest in girls, or any women except Mrs. Senter. I 'd have liked to remind him of this, only I would n't let him see that I read his thoughts.

"I believe you must be mad," said I.

"I should n't wonder," said he. "Anyhow, I 'm mad enough to go straight to Sir Lionel with the whole story the minute he comes back from his walk with his sister and my aunt, unless you do what I want."

"That won't be very nice for Mrs. Senter," I temporized, "if she 's enjoying this trip she was so anxious to take; for if Sir Lionel knows about Ellaline the tour will probably break up, and he 'll rush over to France.

"On the contrary, it will be nice for her," Dick returned, "because many a heart is caught in the rebound."

I said that this argument was too intricate for me, but it was n't really. I knew quite well what he meant, though of course he is absolutely mistaken, as far as Sir Lionel's feelings toward me are concerned. But I had to think quickly, and I thought maybe he was right about his aunt. She would be a woman who would make *any* use

of an emergency. And once she had compromised poor Sir Lionel, it would be too late, for I have an idea he 'd be exaggeratedly honourable.

You may smile at my saying she 'd compromise him. But you know what I mean. I 'm not sure *I* do — but anyhow, I could n't bear to have her do it, especially if it could be prevented by me. I sat still a minute, reflecting, and then asked Dick what he meant by "being engaged."

He replied that he meant the usual thing; and I replied to this that nothing could tempt me. He saw I would n't go back from my word, so he promised, if I *would* be engaged, that he 'd not try even to hold my hand until I should be willing. All he would ask was, that he might tell his aunt we had a "kind of a, sort of an understanding," which might develop into an engagement, and let *her* tell Sir Lionel. Nothing more than that; and why should I mind, when in any case there could never have been a question of my marrying Sir L.?

I said I did mind horribly, but not on that account, and I should never marry anyone. I was almost ready to cry, I felt so wretched. I don't think I was ever as miserable in my life, dear; though, when I come to argue it out with myself, I 've pretended so much to please Ellaline, it ought n't to matter, pretending a little more.

Just then all three of the others came along, and seeing us on the beach, joined us. Dick put on a familiar air with me, as if he had rights, and I saw Sir Lionel glance from me to him, and draw his eyebrows together.

I came indoors then, to my room, and did n't go out again till dinner time. I was half afraid Mrs. Senter

might already have got in her deadly work, but if she had, Sir Lionel did n't say anything to me. Only it was a horrid dinner, in spite of nice, seaside things to eat. Nobody spoke much, and I felt so choked I could hardly swallow.

Oh, I am homesick for you, dear. I hurried upstairs, as soon as dinner was over, saying I had letters to write. To-morrow, early, we start for Sidmouth, in Devonshire, going by way of Weymouth and Dorchester. As I write, looking from my window, across which I have n't drawn the curtains, I can see Sir Lionel and Mrs. Senter strolling out of the hotel, toward the beach. There 's a lovely blue dusk, which the sunset struck into a million glorious sparks, and then let fade again into a dull glow, like ashes of roses. They look a romantic couple walking together. I wonder if they are talking about each other, to each other, or — about *Dick and me?* I feel as if I should have to scream — "Sir Lionel, don't believe it. It is n't true!" But of course, I can't. I think I shall go to bed, and then I won't be tempted to look out of the window.

Always your own loving
AUDRIE.

Please write at once, and address Poste Restante, Torquay.

XIV

SIR LIONEL PENDRAGON TO COLONEL PATRICK O'HAGAN

Knoll Park Hotel, Sidmouth, Devon
August 2nd, Evening

My Dear Pat: I am a fool. By this time you will soon be receiving my first letter, and saying to yourself, "He is on the way to being a fool." Well, I am already that fool. I did n't see where I was drifting, but I see now that it had begun then; and of course you, a spectator, won't be dense as I was at first. You will know.

I did n't suppose this thing could happen to me again. I thought I was safe. But at forty, it 's worse with me than when I was twenty-one.

I don't need to explain. Yet I will say in self-defence that, fool as I am, I am not going to let anyone but you know that I 'm a fool. Especially the girl. She would be thunderstruck. Not that girls of nineteen have n't married men of forty, and perhaps cared for them. But this girl has been brought up since her babyhood to think of me as her guardian, and an elderly person beyond the pale where love or even flirtation is concerned. Imagine a daughter and namesake of Ellaline de Nesville being in the society of a man, and not trying to flirt with him! It 's almost inconceivable. But Ellaline the second

shows not the slightest inclination to flirt with me. She is gentle, sweet, charming, even obedient; perhaps I might say daughterly, if I were willing to hurt my own feelings. Therefore, even without Mr. Dick Burden's oppressive respect for me, I must suppose that I am regarded as a generation behind.

By the way, that young beast made me a present of a cane the other day. Not an ordinary stick, but an old gentleman's cane, with a gold head on it. He said he saw it in a shop at Weymouth, where we stopped for lunch, and thought it so handsome, he begged that I would accept it. His aunt laughed, called him a ridiculous little boy, and advised me to have "Thou shalt not steal" engraved on a gold band, with my name and address. This was to soothe my *amour propre;* but, while I wonder whether the thing really *is* a gift suitable to my years, I long to lay it across the giver's back. He gave it to me before Ellaline, too. What an idiot I am to care! I can laugh, for my sense of humour has n't yet jilted me, if my good sense has. But the laugh is on the wrong side of my mouth.

I feel somewhat better, having confessed my foolishness — which you would have divined without the confession. The girl does n't suspect. I enact the "heavy father" even more ostentatiously than if I were n't ass enough to prefer a rôle for which time and our relationship have unfitted me. But it 's rather curious, is n't it, what power one little woman can wield over a man's life, even the life of a man who is as far as possible from being a "woman's man"? Ellaline de Nesville pretty well spoiled my early youth, or would if I had n't freed myself to take up other

interests. She burdens the remainder of my young years by making me, willy nilly, the guardian of her child. And, not content with that, she (indirectly) destroys what might have been the comfortable contentment of my middle age.

Women are the devil. All but this one — and she is n't a woman yet.

The dangerous part is that I am not as grimly unhappy as I ought to be. There are moments, hours, when I forget that there 's any obstacle dividing Ellaline's future from mine. I think of her as belonging to me. I feel that she is to be a part of my life always, as she is now. And until I have again drummed it into my rebellious head that she is not for me, that my business with her is to see that she gets a rich, well-born, and well-looking young husband, not more than two-thirds of my age, I enjoy myself hugely in her nearness.

But, why not, after all? Just for the length of this tour in the motor-car, which throws us so constantly together? As long as I don't betray myself, why not? Why not revel in borrowed sunshine? At Graylees, I can turn over a new leaf; I need see very little of her there. She and Emily will have plenty to do, with their social duties, and I shall have my own. Let me be a fool in peace till Graylees, then. If I *can* be a fool in peace!

Talking of borrowed sunshine, England seems to have borrowed an inexhaustible supply from some more "favoured clime" this summer. I dare say we shall have to pay for it later. I shall have to pay for my private supply, too — but no matter.

Next to my native Cornwall, I think I prefer Devon-

shire; and Devonshire is being particularly kind and hospitable, offering us her choicest gifts.

It 's said that the Earth is a host who murders all his guests. But he certainly gives some of us, for some of the time, glorious innings during our visit to him. I don't complain, though my stay so far has been accompanied by a good deal of stormy weather.

I remember your once remarking that Weymouth would be a good place to hide in, if you wanted to grow a beard or anything lingering and unbecoming; but you would n't make that remark now: there are too many pretty women in the nice, tranquil old town. Just at this season it 's far from dull, and walking along the Esplanade, while young Nick mended a tyre, I understood something of George the Third's fondness for the place. Certainly vanity would n't permit you to show your nose on parade or beach, in these times, during the beard-growing process, for there 's apparently no hour of the day when a lively scene is n't being enacted on both: the sands thickly dotted with tents; charming girls bathing, chubby children playing, pretty women reading novels under red parasols, fishermen selling silver-scaled fish, boatmen soliciting custom; the parade crowded with "trippers," soldiers and sailors; the wide road noisy with motor-cars and motor-'buses; even the sea gay with boats of all descriptions, and at least one big war vessel hovering in the distance. Besides, there is the clock-tower. I don't know why I like it so much, but I do. I have a feeling that Weymouth would be worth a visit for the sake of that clock alone; and then there 's the extraordinary historical and geological interest, which no other watering-place has.

Burden was anxious to go over to Portland, lured there, no doubt, by the incipient detective talent of which he boasts; but the ladies voted it too sad a place to see, on an excursion of pleasure, and perhaps they were right. The sort of woman who would like to go and spend a happy afternoon staring at a lot of unfortunate wretches dressed in a pattern of broad arrows, would go "slumming" out of idle curiosity; and I have always thought I could not love a woman who amused herself by slumming, any more than I could love one who eagerly patronized bull-fights.

Thomas Hardy's work is too near Nature's heart to appeal to Mrs. Senter, and too clever for my good sister Emily, who will read no author, willingly, unless he calls a spade a pearl-headed hatpin. But Ellaline, strange to say, has been allowed to read him. Evidently French schools are not what they once were; and she and I particularly wanted to go through Dorchester (his Casterbridge) even though we could see nothing of Hardy's place, Max Gate, except its tree-tops. A pity more English towns have n't made boulevards of their earthworks (since there are plenty that have earthworks), planting them with chestnuts and sycamores, as Dorchester has cleverly done. It was an idea worthy of a "Mayor of Casterbridge." We lingered a bit, in the car, picking out "landmarks" of resemblance to the book, and there were plenty. You know, there 's a magnificent Roman amphitheatre near by; but did we stay to look at it? My friend, we are motorists! And it happened to be a grand day with the car, which, though still very new, has "found" itself. "Apollo" seemed a steed of "pure air

and fire; and the dull elements of earth and water never appear in him." He chafed against stopping, and I humoured him gladly.

"Strange," said Ellaline, yesterday, "how a person will pay lots of money to buy a motor-car, and go tearing about the world at great expense, to gratify two little black or blue holes in his face; and then, instead of letting the holes thoroughly absorb his money's worth, he will rush past some of the best things on earth rather than 'spoil a run.'" But she does n't take the intoxication of ozone into consideration in this indictment.

Our road was of the best, and always interesting, with some fine distant views, and here and there an avenue of trees like a vast Gothic aisle in a cathedral. "We could see things so nicely if it were n't for the mists!" sighed Emily, who, if her wish had been a broom, would have ruthlessly swept away those lacy cobwebs clinging to the hill-sides. "Why," replied Ellaline, "you could see a bride's face more clearly if you took away her veil, but it 's the prettiest thing about her." That put my feelings in a nutshell. England would be no bride for me if she threw away her veil; and nowhere did it become her more than in Dorset, Somerset, and Devon, where it is threaded with gold and embroidered with jewels toward the edge of sunset.

Of course, there 's only the most fanciful dividing line between Somerset and Devon, yet I imagine the two counties different in their attributes, as well as in their graces. Surely in Somerset the Downs are on a grander scale. Between two of them you are in a valley, and think that you see mountains. In Devonshire you

have wider horizons, save for the lanes and hedges, which do their best to keep straying eyes fastened on their own beauty.

I suppose men who never have left England take such beauty for granted, but to me, after the flaunting luxuriance of the East, it is enchanting. I notice everything. I want someone, who cares for it as I do, to admire it with me. If it were n't for Dick Burden this England would be making me twenty-one again.

You should see, to understand me, all the lovely things fighting sportively for supremacy in these Devonshire hedges; the convolvulus pretending to throttle the honeysuckle; the honeysuckle shaking creamy fists in the faces of roses that push out, blushing in the starlight of wild clematis, white and purple. Such gentle souls, these Devonshire roses! Kind and innocent, like the sweet, sentimental "Evelinas" of old-fashioned stories, yet full of health, and tingling with buds, as a young girl with fancies.

Devonshire seems to express herself in flowers, as sterner counties do in trees and rocks. Even the children one meets playing in the road are flowers. They are to the pretty cottages what the sweetbriar is to the hedges; and no background could be daintier for the little human blossoms than those same thatched cottages with open, welcoming doors.

Ellaline, fascinated by glimpses through open doors — (old oak dressers set with blue and white china; ancient clocks with peering moon-faces; high-backed chairs; bright flowers in gilt vases on gate-legged tables, all obscurely seen through rich brown shadows) — says she

would like to live in such a cottage with somebody she loved. Who will that somebody be? I constantly wonder. I should think less of her if it could be Dick Burden, or one of his type, yet Mrs. Senter hints that the girl likes his society. *Can* she?

We had a picnic luncheon on our way to Sidmouth, lingering rather long (once you have stopped your motor, nothing matters. If you 're happy, you are as reluctant to go on as you are to stop when going). Then, as they all wished to travel by moonlight, I suggested that dinner also should be a picnic. We bought food and drink at Honiton, and the country being exquisite between there and Sidmouth, we soon found a moss-carpeted, tree-roofed dining-room, fit for an emperor. Nearby glimmered a sheet of blue-bells, like a blue underground lake that had broken through and flooded the meadow. Ellaline said she would like to wash her face in it, as if in a fairy cosmetic, to make her "beautiful forever." I really don't believe she knows that would be superfluous trouble! And a fairy godmother has given her the gift of song. I wish you could hear her sing, Pat. I have heard her only once; but if I had n't been a fool already, I 'd have become one then, beyond recall.

So we sat there, on the still, blue brink of twilight, till the moon rose red as a molten helmet, and cooled to a silver bowl as she sailed higher, dripping light. But tell me this: Would I think of such similes if I were n't like a man who has eaten hasheesh and filled his brain with a fantastic tumult — a magical vision of romance, such as his heart never knew in its youth, never can know except in visions, now that youth has passed? There 's

joy as well as pain in the vision, though, I can tell you, as there must be in any mirage. And it was in a mirage of moonlight and mystery that we took up our journey again, after that second picnic, swooping bird-like, from hill to valley, on our way to the Knoll Park Hotel.

It 's an historic place, by the way, with an interesting past — once it was a country house belonging to an eccentric gentleman — and at present it is extremely ornamental among its lawns and Lebanon cedars.

As for Sidmouth the town, you have but to enter it to feel that you are walking in a quaint old coloured lithograph — one of the eighteenth-century sort, you know, that the artist invariably dedicated, with extravagant humility, to a marquis, if he did n't know a duke!

There 's no architecture whatever. As far as that is concerned, children might have built the original village of Sidmouth as they sat playing on the beach; but the queer cottages, with their low brows of mouse-coloured thatch, protruding amid absurd battlements, have a fantastic charm. They are most engaging, with their rustic-framed bow-windows, like surprised-looking eyes in spectacles; their green veranda-eyebrows, and their smiling, yellow-stucco faces, with low foreheads. The house where Queen Victoria stopped as a little girl is a great show place, of course, and is like a toy flung down against a cushiony hillside, a battlemented doll's house, forgotten by the child who let it fall, while big trees grew up and tried to hide it.

Two cliffs has Sidmouth, and an innocent esplanade, and — that is about all, except the toy town itself. But it 's a place to stay in. A happy man would never

tire of it, I think. An unhappy one might prefer Brighton — or Monte Carlo. I am neither one nor the other. So I prefer a motor-car. We are on the wing again to-morrow.

I must now go to our sitting-room, which looks over the sea, and play a rubber of bridge with Mrs. Senter, Emily, and Burden. Ellaline does n't play.

Hope I have n't bored you with my Burden, and other complaints.

Yours ever,

PEN.

Later, August 2nd, Night

I have opened my letter again, to tell you what came of that rubber of bridge.

I 've lost — all the glamour. The reaction after the hasheesh has set in.

We did n't play long. Just that one rubber, and before we finished Ellaline had taken her copy of "Lorna Doone" upstairs to her own room, without interrupting our game for a good-night. She did n't think we saw her go; but there were two of us who did. Burden was one of the two. I don't need to tell you who the other fool was.

Mrs. Senter and I were partners, as we generally are, if there 's any bridge going in the evening. She 's devoted to the game, and it 's always she who proposes it. I would generally prefer to fag up our route for next day with guide-books and road-maps. But hosts, like beggars, can't be "choosers."

Well, to-night Emily and Burden had all the cards, and Burden wanted a second rubber, but his aunt does n't like losing her money to her nephew, even though we play

for childishly low stakes. She said she "knew that Mrs. Norton was tired," and Emily did n't deny the soft impeachment, as she plays bridge in the same way she would do district visiting during an epidemic of measles — because it is her duty.

Dick had the latest French imitation of Sherlock Holmes to read, and a box of Egyptian cigarettes to smoke (mine), which he evidently thinks too young for me. Emily had some embroidery, which I seem to remember that she began when I was a boy, and kept religiously to do in hotels. (But what is there that my good sister does, which she does not do religiously?) Mrs. Senter had nothing to amuse or occupy her — except your humble servant—consequently she suggested a stroll in the garden before bedtime.

She was almost beautiful in the moonlight, quite ethereal-looking, and her hair a nimbus for that small white face of hers; just as small, just as white, and just as smooth as when those big eyes used to look up into our eyes under an Indian moon. And she is always agreeable, always witty, or at least "smart." Still, I must confess that I was ungallantly absent-minded until something she said waked me up from a brown study.

"He really *is* a nice boy," she was saying, "and after all, it 's a tribute to your distinguished qualities that he should be afraid to speak to you."

I guessed at once that she must have been talking of her nephew.

"What is he afraid to say to me?" I enquired.

"Afraid to ask you for Miss Lethbridge," she explained.

I think just about that time an ugly black eyelid shut down over the moon. Anyhow, the world darkened for me.

"Is n't it rather old-fashioned, in these rapid days, for a young man to ask a guardian's permission to make love to his ward?" said I, savage as a chained dog.

She laughed. "Oh, he has n't waited for that to make love, I 'm afraid," she returned. "But he 's afraid she won't accept him without your consent."

"He seems to be afraid of several things," I growled. "Afraid to speak to me — afraid to speak to her."

"He is young, and love has made him modest," Mrs. Senter excused her favourite. "He knows he is n't a *grand parti*. But if they care for each other?"

"I have seen no reason to believe that she cares for him," said I, thinking myself (more or less) safe in the recollection of Ellaline's words at Winchester. I told you about them, I think.

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Senter, "she cares enough, anyhow, to have entered into a pact of some sort with the poor boy — a kind of understanding that, if *you* approve, she may at least *think* of being engaged to him in the future."

"You are sure she has done that?" I asked, staggered by this statement, which I was far from expecting.

"Quite sure, unless love (in the form of Dick) is deaf as well as blind. He certainly flatters himself that they are on these terms."

"Since when?" I persisted. (By the by, I wonder if the inquisitors ever hit on the ingenious plan of making prisoners torture themselves? Nothing hurts worse than self-torture.)

"Only since Lulworth Cove, or you would have heard

of it before. You know when we came back from our walk, and saw them sitting on the beach together, I said what a pretty picture they made?"

Naturally, I remembered extremely well.

"That was when they had their great scene. Dick begged me, as an old friend of yours, to say a word when I found the chance. And I confess, I 've *made* the chance to-night. I do hope you won't think me impertinent and interfering? I 'm fond of Dick. He 's about all I have to be fond of in the world. And besides — just because I 've never been happy myself, I want others to be, while they 're young, not to waste time."

I muttered something, I hardly know what, and she went on to talk to me of her past, for the first time. Said she had married when little more than a child, and had made the mistake of marrying a man she thought she could manage to live happily with, instead of one she could n't manage to live happily without. That was all; but it had made *all* the difference — and if Miss Lethbridge had given her first love to Dick ——

I nearly said, "Hang first love!" but I held my tongue, fortunately, for of course she meant well, and was only doing her best for her nephew. But how anyone could love that fellow passes my understanding! Why, it seems to me the creature 's parents could hardly have loved him, unless he had had something of the monstrous hypnotism, as well as the selfishness, of a young cuckoo in its stolen nest. Yet the same hypnotism may influence birds outside the nest, I suppose. That 's the only way to account for an infatuation on the part of Ellaline.

"If you are angry, Dick and I must go away,"

Mrs. Senter went on. "But he could n't help falling in love, and to me they seem made for each other."

I had to answer that of course I was n't angry, but I thought any talk of love premature, to say the least.

"You won't actually refuse your consent, then?" asked she.

"Much good my refusing would do, if the girl really cares!" said I. "I shan't disinherit her, whatever she does."

Mrs. Senter laughed at that. "Why, even if you did," said she, "it would n't matter greatly to them, because Dick has something of his own, and she is an heiress, is n't she?"

Then — I don't know whether I was wrong or not — but I swear I made the answer I did without any mean or selfish motives — if I can read my own soul. If Burden were a fortune-hunter, I wanted to save her from him, that 's all. I told Mrs. Senter that Ellaline had very little money of her own. "I shall look after her, of course," I said. "But the amount of the *dot* I may give will be determined by circumstances."

I don't know that I may n't have put this in a tactless way. Anyhow, Mrs. Senter looked rather odd — hurt, or distressed, or something queer — I could n't make quite out. She said, nevertheless, that Dick did not care for Miss Lethbridge's money. He had fallen in love with her the first time they met. Nothing else mattered, as they would have enough to live on. But she had supposed the girl almost too rich for Dick. Was n't Ellaline a relation of the millionaire family of Lethbridges? She had heard so.

I answered that the relationship was distant. That Ellaline's father had once been a friend of mine, and that her mother had been my cousin, though a French girl.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Senter, as if suddenly enlightened. "Is she — by any chance — the daughter of a *Frederic* Lethbridge?"

What she recalled about Fred Lethbridge, I can't guess. She is n't old enough to have known him, unless as a child or a very young girl. But she certainly had some thought in connection with him which made her silent and reflective. I hope I have done Ellaline no harm — in case the girl really does care for Burden. I never had the intention of keeping her parentage secret, though at the same time it would pain me to have any gossip reach her. However, to do Mrs. Senter justice, I don't think she is a gossip. She likes to say "smart" things, but so far as I have heard, she is never smart at other people's expense. And since her confidences to me concerning her past, I am sorry for the poor little woman.

Not much more passed between us on the subject of Ellaline and Dick, except that I refused to recommend the young man to the girl's good graces. I had to tell Mrs. Senter that, not even for the pleasure of pleasing her, could I consent to do what she asked. But I did finally promise to let Ellaline know that personally I had no objection to the alleged "understanding," if it were for her happiness. Nevertheless, I would advise her that she must do nothing rash. Mrs. Senter not only permitted, but actually suggested, this extra clause; and our *séance* ended.

Some things are too strange not to be true; and I suppose this infatuation of Ellaline's, if it exists, is one of them. And it must exist. There can be no doubt of it, since Mrs. Senter has it from the boy — who apparently has it from the girl.

What to make of it, however, that she told me only about ten days ago, she did n't like him? Yet I am forgetting. We have it on good authority that " 'tis best to begin with a little aversion."

I ought to have known that a daughter of Ellaline de Nesville and Frederic Lethbridge could n't develop into the star-high being this girl has seemed to me; and I must make the best of it that she 's something less in soul than, in my first burst of astonished admiration, I was inclined to appraise her. After all, why feel bitter against people because they have disappointing shortcomings, if not defects, instead of the dazzling virtues that glittered in your imagination? Cream always rises to the top, yet we don't think less of it because there 's nothing but milk underneath.

Yes, if I find out that she likes this hypnotic cuckoo I must n't despise her for it. But I must find out as soon as I can. Suspense is the one unbearable pain. And you are at liberty to laugh at me as I hope I shall soon be laughing at myself.

L. P.

XV

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Osborne Hotel, Torquay
August 6th

Ma Petite Minerve-de-Mere: A hundred and six and a half thanks for your counsels and consolations. I needed both, and not a bit the less because I 'm not unhappy now I 'm violently happy. It won't last, but I love it — this happiness. I keep it sitting on my shoulder and stroking its wings, so it may n't remember when it 's time to fly away.

That letter I wrote you *was* silly. I was a regular cry-baby to write it. But I 'm so glad you answered quickly. I don't know how I should have borne it if the man at the Poste Restante window had said: "Nothing for you. miss." I might have responded with blows.

There was a letter from Ellaline, too. I 'd sent her the "itinerary" as far as I knew it, and Torquay was the last place on the list. I was wondering if anything were the matter, but there is n't — though there *is* news. She waited to write, she says, so that her plans might be decided and she could tell them to me.

The military manœuvres go on; and the news has nothing directly to do with the adored Honoré. But Ellaline has made a confidante — a Scotch girl she has

met. I don't mean she 's told everything; far from that, apparently. She has kept the fraudulent part, about me, secret, and only confided the romantic part, about herself. What she says she has told is, that she 's run away from cruel persons who want to have all her money, and to prevent her from having any happiness. That she 's hiding till the man she 's engaged to can take her to Scotland and have a Scotch marriage — at Gretna Green, if possible, because it would be romantic, and her mother was married there. The Scotch girl, with northern coldness of reason, has pointed out that Gretna Green is nowadays like any other place, but Ellaline is not weaned from the idea. She appears to have fascinated her new friend (as she did her old ones), in spite of the northern coldness, and has received a pressing invitation to visit at the girl's house in Scotland until Honoré can claim her.

There is a mother, as well as a girl, but only a stepmother, and apparently a detail; for the girl has the money and the strength of will. The two are stopping in a pension near Madame de Blanchemain's house. The girl is a Miss McNamarra, with freckles and no figure, but engaged to an officer, and consequently sympathetic. She has advised Ellaline that, if she travels from France to Scotland with Honoré, on the way to be married, he may n't respect her as much as if she had friends and chaperons, and a nice place to wait for him. Ellaline is too French at heart not to feel that this advice is good — though she adds in her letter that she, of course, trusts darling Honoré completely; — so she has accepted the invitation.

The only trouble is, she wants more money at once. She must let golden louis run through her fingers like water, for I sent her nearly all Sir Lionel handed me before we started on the trip. I shall have to ask him for more, and I 'll hate doing that, because, though I shall be gone out of his life so soon, I 'm too vain and self-conscious (it must be that!) to like making a bad impression on his mind while we 're together.

I shan't hate it as much, however, as I should, supposing that something which happened last night *had n't* happened. I 'm coming to that part presently. It 's the thing that 's made me happy — the thing that won't last long.

We left adorable little Sidmouth days ago — I almost forget how many, coming as far as Exeter along a lovely road. But then, everything is lovely in Devonshire. It is almost more beautiful than the New Forest, only so different that, thank goodness, it is n't necessary to compare the two kinds of scenery.

Perhaps Devonshire, stripped of its bold, red rocks, drained of its brilliant blue sea, and despoiled of its dark moors, might be too sugary sweet with its flower-draped cottages, and lanes like green-walled conservatories; but it is so well balanced, with its intimate sweetnesses, and its noble outlines. I think *you* are rather like Devonshire, you 're so perfect, and you are the most well-balanced person I was ever introduced to — except Dad. I 'm proud that his ancestors were Devonshire men. And oh, the junket and Devonshire cream are even better than he used to tell me! I have n't tasted the cider yet, because I can't bear to miss the cream at any

meal; and the chambermaid at Sidmouth warned me that they "did n't mix."

Bits of Devonshire are like Italy, I find. Not only is the earth deep red in the meadows, where the farmers have torn open its green coat, and many of the roads a pale rose-pink — dust and all — but lots of houses and cottages are pink, a real Italian pink, so that whole villages blush as you look them in the face. Sometimes, too, there 's a blue or a green, or a golden-ochre house; here and there a high, broken wall of rose or faded yellow, with torrential geraniums boiling over the top. And the effect of this riot of colour, in contrast with the silver gray of the velvety thatch, or lichen-jewelled slate roofs, under great, cool trees, is even more beautiful than Italy. If all England is a park, Devonshire is a queen's garden.

From Sidmouth we went to Budleigh Salterton (why either, but especially both?), quaintly pretty, and rather Holland-like with its miniature bridges and canal. Then to Exmouth, with its flowering "front," its tiny "Maison Carrée" (which would remind one more of Nîmes if it had no bay windows), and its exquisite view across silver river, and purple hills that ripple away into faint lilac shadows in the distance. Then we struck inland, to Exeter, and at Exeter we stopped two days, in the very oldest and queerest but nicest hotel imaginable.

I was n't so very happy there, because the Thing I 'm going to tell you about in good time had n't happened yet. But I 'm not sure that I was n't more in tune with Exeter than if I had been as happy as I am now. The scenery here suits my joyous mood; and the grave tranquillity of

the beautiful old cathedral town calmed my spirit when I needed calm.

I 've given up expecting to love any other cathedral as I loved Winchester. Chichester I 've half forgotten already — except some of the tombs. Salisbury was far more beautiful, far more impressive in its proportions than Winchester, yet to me not so impressive in other ways; and Exeter Cathedral struck me at first sight as curiously low, almost squat. But as soon as I lived down the first surprise of that effect I began to love it. The stone of which the Cathedral is built may be cold and gray; but time and carvings have made it solemn, not depressing. I stood a long time looking up at the west front, not saying a word; but something in me was singing a Te Deum. And how you would love the windows! You used always to say, when we were in Italy and France, that it was beautiful windows which made you love a cathedral or church, as beautiful eyes make one love a face.

This Cathedral has unforgettable eyes, and a tremendously long history, beginning as far back as nine hundred and something, when Athelstan came to Exeter and drove out the poor British who thought it was theirs. He built towns, founded a monastery in honour of Saint Mary and Saint Peter, not having time, I suppose, to do one for each. And afterward the monastery decided that it would be a cathedral instead. But two hundred and more years earlier, that disagreeable St. Boniface, who disliked the Celts so much, went to a Saxon school in Exeter! I wonder what going to school was like when all the world was young?

I wandered into the Cathedral both mornings to hear the music; and something about the dim, moonlit look of the interior made me feel *good*. You will say that's rather a change for me, perhaps, because you tell me reproachfully, sometimes, after I 've thought about the people's hats and the backs of their blouses in church, that I have only a bowing acquaintance with religion. I don't know whether I may n't be doing the most dreadful wrong every minute by pretending to be Ellaline; but it was *begun* for a good purpose, as you know, and you yourself consented. And though I have twinges sometimes, I did feel good at Exeter. Oh, it did me heaps of good to *feel* good! You have to live up to your feelings, if you feel like that. And I prayed in the Cathedral. I prayed to be happy. Is that a wrong note for a prayer? I don't believe it is, if it rings true. Anyway, it makes me feel young and strong to pray, like Achilles, after he 'd rolled on the earth. And I do feel so young and strong just now, dear! I have to sing in my bath, and when I look out of the window — also sometimes when I look in the glass, for it seems to me that I am growing brighter and prettier.

I love to be pretty, because it 's such a beautiful world, and to be pretty is to be in the harmony of it. Though, perhaps — only perhaps, mind! — I 'm glad I 'm not a regular beauty. It would be such a responsibility in the matter of wearing one 's clothes, and doing one's hair, and never getting tanned or chapped.

And I love to be thin, and alive — alive, with my soul in proportion to my body, like a hand in a glove, not like a seed in a big apple. But is n't this funny talk, in the

midst of describing Exeter? It 's because of the reaction from misery to ecstasy that I 'm so bubbly. I can't stop; but luckily it did n't come on in Exeter, because the delightful, queer old streets are n't at all suitable to bubble in. It 's impertinent to be excessively young there, especially in the beautiful cathedral close, where it is so calm and dignified, and the rooks, who are very, very old, do nothing but caw about their ancestors. I think some curates ought to turn into rooks when they die. They would be quite happy.

Our hotel, as I said, was fascinating, though Mrs. Norton fell once or twice, as there were steps up and down everywhere, and Dick bumped his forehead on a door. (I was n't at all sorry for him.) Mrs. Senter said, if we 'd stopped long she would have got "cottage walk," and as she already had motor-car face and bridge eye, she thought the combination would be *trop fort*. If she were n't Dick's aunt, and if she were n't so determined to flirt with Sir Lionel without his knowing what she 's at, and if she did n't make little cutting speeches to me when he is n't listening, I think I should find her amusing.

The only things I did n't like at the hotel were the eggs; which looked so nice, quite brown, and dated the morning you had them, on their shells, but tasting mediæval. I wonder if eggs can be post-dated, like cheques? As for the other eatables, there was very little taste in them, mediæval or otherwise. I do think ice-cream, for instance, ought to taste like something, if it 's only hair oil. And the head waiter had such mournful-looking hair!

I never got a talk alone with Sir Lionel in Exeter, because though he tried once or twice, with the air of having a

painful duty to accomplish, I was afraid he was going to ask me about Dick, and I just felt I could n't bear it, so avoided him, or instantly tacked myself on to Emily or someone. I think Emily approves of my running to her, whenever threatened by man's society, because she thinks the instinctive desire to be protected from anything male is pretty and maidenly. She certainly belongs to the Stone Age in some of her ideas; though her maxims are of a later period. Many of them she draws (and quarters) from the Scriptures; at least, she attributes them to the Scriptures, but I know some of them to be in Shakespeare. Lots of people seem to make that mistake!

Of course, in the car I never talk to Sir Lionel, except a word flung over shoulders now and then, for Mrs. Senter sits by him. She asked to. Did I tell you that before? So the day we left Exeter things were just the same between us; not trustful and silently happy, as at the time of the *ring*, but rather strained, and vaguely official.

It had rained a little in Exeter, but the sky and landscape were clean-washed and sparkling as we sailed over the pink road, past charming little Starcross, with its big swan-boat and baby swan-boat; past Dawlish of the crimson cliffs and deep, deep blue sea (if I were a Bluer — just as good a word as Brewer! — I would buy Dawlish as an advertisement for my blue. It seems made for that by Nature, and is so brilliant you 'd never believe it was true, on a poster); down a toboggan slide of a hill into Teignmouth, another garden-town by the sea, and through one of England's many Newtons — Newton Abbot, this time — to Torquay.

As we had n't left Exeter until after luncheon, it was

evening when we arrived; but that, Sir Lionel said, was what he wanted, on account of the lights in and on and above the water, which he wanted us to see as we came to the town. He has been here before, long ago, as he has been at most of the places; but he says that he enjoys and appreciates everything more now than he did the first time.

It was like a dream! — a dream all the way from Newton Abbot, where sunset began to turn the silver streak of river in the valley red as wine. There was just one ugly interval: the long, dull street by which we entered Torquay, with its tearing trams and common shops; but out of it we came suddenly into a scene of enchantment. That really is n't too enthusiastic a description, for in front of us lay the harbour; the water violet, flecked with gold, the sky blazing still, coral-red to the zenith, where the moon drenched the fire with a silver flood. The hills were deeper violet than the sea, sparkling with lights that sprang out of the twilight; and on the smooth water a hundred little white boats danced over their own reflections.

We begged Sir Lionel not to let Young Nick light our lamps, for they are so fierce and powerful, they swallow up the beauty of the evening. But I do think, where there are lots of motors about, it would be nice if *people* had to be lighted at night, and especially dogs.

Now, at last, I have come to the Thing — the thing that makes me happy, with a happiness all the more vivid because it can't last. But even if I fall to the depths of misery once more, I shan't be a coward, and moan to you. It must be horrid to get letter after letter, full of wails! I don't see how Mademoiselle Julie de Lespinasse could

write the letters she did; and I can't much blame Monsieur de Guibert for dreading to read them, always in the same key, and on the same note: "I suffer, I suffer. I want to die."

Well, I 've kept you waiting long enough, or have you, perhaps, read ahead? I should, in your place, though I hope *you* have n't.

We came to the Osborne because Sir Lionel knew and liked it, though there 's another hotel grander, and we usually go to the grandest (so odd, that feels, after our travels, yours and mine, when our *first* thought was to search out the cheapest place in any town!), and the Osborne has a terraced garden, which runs down and down the cliffs, toward the sea, with a most alluring view.

Mrs. Senter had luggage come to meet her here, and she appeared at dinner in our private sitting-room looking quite startlingly handsome, in a black chiffon dress embroidered in pale gold, exactly the colour of her hair. The weather had turned rather cold, however, since the rain at Exeter, so, gorgeous as the moonlight was, she wanted to stop indoors after dinner, and proposed bridge, as usual.

That was the signal for me to slip away. I 'd finished "Lorna Doone," which is the loveliest love story in the English language (except part of "Richard Feverel"), so I thought I would go into the garden. I felt moderately secure from Dick, because, even if he really *is* in love with me, he is as much in love with bridge, and besides, he 's afraid of his aunt, for some reason or other. As for Sir Lionel, it did n't occur to me that he might even *want* to come.

I strolled about at first, not far from the hotel. Then I was tempted farther and farther down the cliff path, until I found a thatched summer-house, where I sat and thought what a splendid, ornamental world it would be to live in if one were *quite* happy.

By this time the sky and sea were bathed in moonlight, the stone pines — so like Italian pines — black against a silver haze. In the dark water the path of the moon lay, very broad and long, all made of great flakes of thick, deep gold, as if the sea were paved with golden scales.

It was so lovely it saddened me, but I did n't want to go indoors; and presently I heard footsteps on the path. I was afraid it was Dick, after all, as he is horribly clever about finding out where one has gone — so detectivey of him! — but in another second I smelt Sir Lionel's kind of cigarette smoke. It would make me think of him if it were a hundred years from now! Still, Dick borrows his cigarettes often, as he says they 're too expensive to buy, so I was n't safe. Indeed, *which ever* it turned out to be, I was n't safe, because one might be silly, and the other might scold.

But it was Sir Lionel, and he saw me, although I made myself little and stood in the shadow, not daring to sit down again, because the seat squeaked.

"Are n't you cold?" he asked.

I answered that I was quite warm.

Then he said that it was a nice night, and we talked about the weather, and all that idiotic sort of thing, which means empty brains or hearts too full.

By and by, when I was beginning to feel as though I

should scream if it went on much longer, he stopped suddenly, in a conversation about fresh fish, and said: "Ellaline, I think I must speak of something that 's been on my mind for some days."

He 'd never called me "Ellaline" before, but only "you," and this gave me rather a start, to begin with, so I said nothing. And, as it turned out, that was probably the best thing I could have done. If I 'd said anything, it would have been the wrong thing, and then, perhaps, we should have started off with a misunderstanding.

"I should hate to have you think me unsympathetic," he went on. "I 'm not. But — do you want to marry Dick Burden, some day?"

If he 'd put it differently I might have hesitated what to answer, for I *am* afraid of Dick, there 's no use denying it — of course, mostly on Ellaline's account, but a little on my own too, because I 'm a coward, and don't want to be disgraced. As it was, I *could n't* hesitate, for the thought of marrying Dick Burden would have been insupportable if it had n't been ridiculous. So you see, I forgot to dread what Dick might do if he heard, and just blurted out the truth.

"I 'd sooner go into a convent," said I.

"You mean that?" Sir Lionel pinned me down.

" I do," I repeated. "Could you imagine a girl wanting to marry Dick Burden?"

"No, *I* could n't," said Sir Lionel. And then he laughed — such a nice, happy laugh, like a boy's, quite different from the way I have heard him laugh lately — though at first, in London, he seemed young and light-

hearted. "But I 'm no judge of the men — or boys — a girl might want to marry. Dick 's good-looking, or near it."

"Yes," I admitted. "So is your little chauffeur. But I don't want to marry it."

"Are you flirting with Dick, then?" Sir Lionel asked, not sharply, but almost wistfully.

I could n't stand that. I had to tell the truth, no matter for to-morrow!

"I 'm not flirting with him, either," I said.

"What then?"

"Nothing."

"But he seems to think there is something — something to hope."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No. He sent me word."

"Oh! Words get mixed, when they 're sent. He *knows* I 'm not flirting with him."

"Does he know — forgive me — does he know that you don't love him — a little?"

"He knows I don't love him at all."

"Then I — can't understand," said Sir Lionel.

"Would you like me to love him?" I could n't help asking.

"No," he began, and stopped. "I should like you to be happy, in your own way," he went on more slowly. "I 've been at a loss, because a little while ago you said you did n't like Burden, and then you seemed to change your mind ——"

"It was only seeming," I continued on my reckless course. "My mind toward him stands where it did."

"If that is so, what have you done to him, to give him hope?"

"Nothing I could help," I said.

"There 's a strange misunderstanding somewhere, apparently," Sir Lionel reflected aloud.

"Oh, don't let there be one between us!" I begged, looking up at him suddenly.

He put his hand out as suddenly, and grabbed — literally grabbed — mine. I was so happy! Is n't it nice that men are so much stronger than women, and that we 're meant to like them to be? It can make life so interesting.

As his fingers pressed mine, I let mine press his too, and felt we were friends. "By Jove, no, we won't," he said. And though it was n't much to say, nothing could have pleased me better. The words and the tone seemed to match the close clasp of our hands.

"Would you be willing to trust me?" I asked.

"Of course. But in what way do you mean?"

"About Dick Burden. He *does n't* think I 'm flirting, and he does n't think I care for him. Yet I want you to trust me, and not say anything to him or to his aunt. Let Dick and me fight it out between us."

He laughed again. "With all my heart, if you want to fight. But I won't have you annoyed. If he annoys you he must go. I will get rid of him."

"Dick can't annoy me if he does n't make trouble for me with you, Sir Lionel," I said. (And that was the truth.) "Only, if you 'll just trust me to manage him?"

"You 're very young to undertake the management of a man."

"Dick is n't a man. He 's a boy."

"And you — are a child."

"I may seem a child to you," I said, "but I 'm not. I 'll be so happy, and I 'll thank you so much, if you 'll just let things go on as they are for a little while. You 'll be glad afterward if you do."

And he will, when I 've gone and Ellaline has come. He will be glad he did n't give himself too much trouble on my account. But I 'm not going to think now of what his opinion of me may be *then*. At present he has a very good, kind opinion. Even though I am a child in his eyes, I am a dear child; and though it can't last, it does make me happy to be dear to him, in any way at all — this terrible Dragon of Ellaline's.

But that is n't the end of our conversation. The real end was an anti-climax, perhaps, but I liked it. For that matter, the tail of a comet's an anti-climax.

It was only that, when we 'd talked on, and he 'd promised to trust me, and leave the reins in my hands, while he attended solely to the steering of his motor-car, I said: "Now we must go in. Mrs. Senter will be wanting to finish her rubber." (I forgot to tell you that he explained she 'd had a telegram, and had been obliged to hurry and write a letter, to catch the last post. That had stopped a game in the middle.)

"Oh, hang it all, I suppose she will!" he grumbled, more to himself than to me, because, if he 'd paused to think, he would have been too polite to express himself so about a guest, whatever his feelings were. But that 's why I was pleased. He spoke impulsively, without

thinking. Was n't it a triumph, that he would rather have stayed there in the garden, even with a "child," than hurry back to that radiant white-and-gold (and black) vision?

Now you know why I am so pleased with life.

All that happened last night, and to-day we have had "excursions," but no "alarums." We (every one, not just he and I) have been to Kent's Cavern, where prehistoric tigers' teeth grinned at us from the walls, and have taken a walk to Babbicombe Bay, where we had tea. I think it was the loveliest path I ever saw, that cliff way, with the gray rocks, and the blue sea into which the sky had emptied itself, like a cup with a silver rim. And the wild flowers — the little, dainty, pink-tipped daisies, which I could n't bear to crush — and the larks that sprang out of the grass! There are things that make you feel so at *home* in England, dear. I think it is like no other country for that.

To-morrow we are to motor to Princetown, on Dartmoor — Eden Phillpotts, land — and are coming back to Torquay at night. If I have time I 'll write you a special Dartmoor letter, for I have an idea that I shall find the moor wonderfully impressive. But we may n't get back till late; and the day after we are to start early in the morning for Sir Lionel's county, Cornwall. Afterward we shall come back into another part of Devonshire, and see Bideford and Exmoor. That 's why I 've been able to forget some of my worries in "Westward Ho!" and "Lorna Doone" lately. But Sir Lionel can't wait longer for Cornwall, and, so day-after-to-morrow night my eyes shall look upon — only think of it — "dark Tintagel by the

Cornish sea." That is, we shall see it, Apollo permitting, for motors and men gang aft aglee.

This is n't apropos of Apollo's usual behaviour, but of the stories we 've been told concerning Dartmoor roads. They say — well, there 's nothing to worry about with Sir Lionel at the helm; but I should n't wonder if to-morrow will be an adventure.

There, now, I 'm sorry I said that. You may be anxious; but I can't scratch it out, and it 's nearly at the bottom of *such* a big sheet. So I 'll wire to-morrow night, when we get back, and you 'll have the telegram before you have this letter.

Your how-to-be-happy-though-undeserving,

But ever loving,

AUDRIE.

XVI

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Still Torquay, Ten Thirty
August 7th

DEAREST: I thought the moor would be impressive. It is overwhelming. Oh, this Devonshire of my father's people is far from being all a land of cream and roses!

Dartmoor has given me so many emotions that I am tired, but I must tell you about it and them. When I shut my eyes, I see tors, like ruined watch-towers, against the sky. And I see Princetown, grim and terrible.

No country can look its best on a map, no matter what colour be chosen to express it; but I did like Dartmoor's rich brown, which set it apart from the green parts of Devonshire. It took some time, though, even in a motor, to come to the brown; for our road was fairy-like as far as Holne, Charles Kingsley's birthplace. We got out there, of course, and looked at his memorial window in the charming village church. At Holne Bridge I thought of the beautiful way to the Grande Chartreuse; so you can imagine it was far from sterile, although we were on the fringe of the moor. And ah, what a lovely green fringe the brown moor wears! It is all trimmed round the edge with woods, and glens, where the baby River Dart goes laughing by. And there 's a most romantic Lover's

Leap, of course. Strange how so many lovers, though of different countries, have all that same wild desire to jump off something! If I were a lover I should much rather die a flat, neat death.

We saw this Lover's Leap only at a distance when going toward the moor, but coming back — however, I will tell you about it afterward, when I come to Buckland Chase, on the way home.

It was at Holne that the big hills, of which we 'd been warned, began; but Apollo merely sniffs at gradients that make smaller, meaner motors grunt with rage. We had a car behind us (which had started ahead), but it was rather an ominous sign to see no "pneu" tracks in the white dust of the road as we travelled. Other days, we have always had them to follow; and it makes a motor feel at home to know that his brethren have come and gone that way. This must have seemed to Apollo like isolation; and as if to emphasize the sensation which we all shared, suddenly we began to *smell* the moor.

I can't describe to you exactly what that smell was like, but we *knew* it was the moor. The air became alive and life-giving. It tingled with a cold breath of the north, and one thought of granite with the sun on it, and broom in blossom, and coarse grass such as mountain-sheep love, though one saw none of those things yet. The scenery was still gentle and friendly, and the baby Dart was singing at the top of its voice. Really, it was almost a tune. I felt, as I listened, that it would be easy to set it to music. The moss-covered stones round which purled the clear water looked like the whole notes and half notes, all ready to be pushed into place, so that the tune might "arrange

itself." And the amber brown of the stream was mottled with gold under the surface, as if a sack full of sovereigns had been emptied into the river.

The first tor on our horizon was Sharp Tor, which the Dart evidently feared. The poor little river disappeared at sight of it, hurrying away from its frown, and as the stream vanished all the dainty charm of the landscape fled, too. We saw the moor towering toward us, stern and barren, with that great watch-tower of Nature's pinning it to the sky.

Moorland ponies raced to and fro, mad with the joy of some game they were playing, and they were not afraid of us. I should think the live things of the moor were afraid of nothing that could come to them out of the world beyond, for that pungent air breathes "courage," and the gray granite, breaking through the poor coat of grass, dares the eyes that look at it not to be brave.

Near the moorland ponies — on Holne Moor — we came to the strangest reservoir you could dream of. It was vast, and blue as a block fallen out of the sky; and once, Sir Lionel said, it had been a lake, though now it gives water to the prison town. An old road used to run through it; and to this day you can see the bridge under water. The story is that strange forms cross that bridge at night. I 'm sure it 's true, for anything could happen on the moor, and of course it swarms with pixies. You believe that, don't you? Well, anyway, you would if you saw the moor.

The next tor was nameless for us, but it was even finer than Sharp Tor. After seeing Stonehenge I felt so certain it must be Druidical that it was disappointing to hear it

was n't — that all such theories about the tors had "exploded." Afterward there were lots of tors; and there were tin mines, too, not far from our wild, desolate road — tin mines that have always been worked, they say, since the days of the Phœnicians. I should have been more interested in thinking about them, however, if we had n't just then begun gliding down a hill which, from the top, looked as if it might go straight through to China. My toes felt as if they 'd been done up in curl-papers for years. But there was a savage joy in the creepiness of it, and Apollo "chunk-chunked" sturdily down, in a nice, dependable way, toward a lonely village, which I felt sure was entirely populated by Eden Phillpotts people. He, and the other authors who write about the moor, invariably make their leading characters have "primitive passions," so I thought perhaps the faces of the moor folk would be wilder and stranger, and have more meaning than other civilized faces. But all those I saw looked just like everybody else, and I was so disappointed! They even dropped their "h's"; and once, when we stopped a moment at a place where Sir Lionel was n't sure of the way, I asked a boy on a rough pony the names of some trees we had passed. "H'ash and green h'elm, miss," said he. It *was* a blow!

Toward eleven, the sun had drunk up the cold mist, and the moor basked in heat. We were in an empty world, save for a cottage now and then, and a Cyclopean wall of stones loosely piled one upon another. Yet this was the main road from Ashburton to Princetown! Apollo glided along a desolate white way between creamy and silver grasses artistically intermingled, and burning,

golden gorse, which caught the sun. The splendid, dignified loneliness of the moor was like the retreat chosen by a hermit god! There may be only twenty square miles of moor, but it feels like a hundred.

Hexworthy and the Forest Inn, which we came to in a valley, were curiously Swiss, all but the ancient cross which made me think of Eden Phillpotts's "American Prisoner." How can I say an "ancient" cross, though, when the *really* old things on the moor began not only before Christ, but before history — the stone circles, the cairns and the cromlechs, the kistvaen and the barrows! The hut circles, where a forgotten people used to live, are strewn in thousands over the moor, and cooking utensils are sometimes dug up, even now; so you see, everything is n't discovered yet. The people had n't any metal to work with, poor creatures, until the Bronze Age, and they clothed themselves in skins, which I suppose their dressmakers and tailors made when the sheep and cows that wore them first had been cut up and eaten. I wonder if girls were pretty in those days, or men handsome, and if anyone cared? But I suppose knowing the difference between ugliness and beauty is as old as Adam and Eve. If Eve had n't been pretty, Adam would n't have looked at her, but would have waited in the hope of something better.

The first sight of Princetown only intensified the loneliness of the moor, somehow, partly because it loomed so gray and grim, partly, perhaps, because we knew it to be a prison town. The dark buildings looked as much a natural growth of the moor as those ruined temples on the horizon, which were tors. It was almost impossible to

believe that Plymouth was only fifteen miles away. And the sombreness and gloom of the melancholy place increased instead of diminished as we drew nearer to it, after leaving behind us the pleasant oasis of Tor Bridge and its little hotel that anglers and walkers love.

The prison settlement was stuck like a black vice-spot in the midst of wide purity. Gloom hung over it in a pall, and stole the warmth from the sunshine. What a town to name after a Prince Regent! and what a town to have lunch in! Yet it was a singularly good lunch.

We ate it in a hotel built of gray stone, with gray stone colonnades, which looked like an annex to the prison. There was meat pie, which one expected to find smoking hot, and it gave quite a shock to find it not only cold, but iced. There was a big, cool dining-room, all mysterious, creeping shadows, and queer echoes when one dared to speak. And unless one did speak the silence sent a chill through one's body, but it was an interesting chill. Certainly the hotel was the strangest I ever saw; and the hotel dog was like no other animal on land or sea. He appeared to be a mixture of brindled bull and Irish terrier, with long side-whiskers on a bull-dog face. He was a nightmare, but he loved Devonshire cream and junket, and ate them as if he were a lamb.

We stayed a long time in Princetown, and then started to go home by a different way. Out of a vast moorland tract we descended to Dartmoor Bridge, the prettiest oasis in the wild desert of moor which we had seen yet. But soon we were back in moorland again, with tors rising up to snatch at heaven with their dark claws. Each one seemed different from all the rest, just as people's faces are

different in crowds. Some were like crests of waves, petrified as they were ready to break; but the weirdest of all were exactly like ruined forts of dwarfs. And presently the scenery changed again in a kaleidoscopic way. We came to lovely Houndsgate, with a great, deep wonder-valley far below us, only to return to a region of tors and bracken, and to plunge down the most tremendous hill of all — a hill which was like gliding down the glassy side of an ocean wave.

I had just exclaimed, "See, there 's a motor ahead of us!" when an extraordinary thing happened. The car going before us, very fast, suddenly ran to the side of the steep road, stopped, some people jumped out, and at the same instant a great flame spouted straight up toward the sky.

Not one of us said one word, except Emily, who squeaked, and cried, "Oh, Lionel! we shall all be killed and burned up!"

Of course, Sir Lionel did n't answer. I would have given anything to be in Mrs. Senter's place, sitting beside him, so that I could see his face, and guess what he meant to do. But it was decided and done in a few seconds. He took Apollo on a little farther, and then stopped as near the burning motor as he dared, so that there might be no danger of our catching fire. Before we could have counted "one, two," he had sprung from the car and was running toward the fiery chariot, with Young Nick flying after him. Dick Burden got down, too, and sauntered in their wake, but he did n't go very fast.

It was so exciting and confusing that I scarcely understood at first what was happening, but Sir Lionel tore off

his coat as he ran, and flung it round the woman from the other car. She had not been on fire when she jumped out, but the grass and bushes close by the road had already begun to blaze, and her dress had caught in the flame. She was tall and big, but Sir Lionel lifted her up as if she 'd been a child, and, wrapped in his coat, laid her down at a little distance on the grass, where he rolled her over, and put out the fire. Then, when she was on her feet again, panting and sobbing a little, he and the other men began stamping out the flames playing among the low bushes, lest they spread along the moor. As for the car, Sir Lionel said afterward it was hopeless trying to save her, as there were gallons and gallons of petrol to burn (it was her brakes that had got on fire, and ignited the rest), and no sand or anything of that sort to throw on. But while we were staring at the strange scene, the flames died down, having drunk up all the petrol; and whether some part of the mechanism which held the red-hot brakes in place gave way suddenly, I don't know. All I do know is, that the car quivered, moved forward, began running down the tremendous hill, faster and faster, until, with a wild bound, she disappeared from our sight over a precipice.

By this time we were all out, except Emily, hurrying down the hill, to talk to the people who had lost their car; but would you believe it, they hardly cared for their loss, now they were out of danger? It was a bride and groom, with their chauffeur, and they were Americans, staying at the Imperial, in Torquay. The bridegroom was elderly but humorous, and told us he used to hate motors and kept tortoises for pets, because he liked everything that moved slowly, all his ancestors having come from Phila-

delphia. But the girl he loved would n't marry him unless he promised to take her to England on an automobile trip. Now he hoped she had had enough, and would let him go back to tortoises again.

He said he had never enjoyed anything so much as seeing the car's red-hot skeleton jump over the precipice, where it could not hurt anyone, but would just fall quietly to pieces on the rocks.

The bride was great fun, too, and as she comes from St. Louis, it is not likely she will cultivate tortoises. When we took them all three back to Torquay with us, squashed in anyhow, she talked about running over to Paris and buying a balloon or an aeroplane! We came by way of the Buckland Chase, as it is called — private property; and an elfin glen of beauty, for mile after mile, with the Dart singing below, and the Lover's Leap so close that it seemed painfully realistic — especially after the adventure of the car which leaped into space.

Sir Lionel got his coat burnt, and his hands a little, too; but he would drive, though Young Nick might have done so as well as not.

After all we shan't get to Cornwall to-morrow! Sir Lionel says it would be a crime to leave this part of the world without going up the Dart (the "Rhine of England") in a boat, and seeing the beautiful old Butter Market at Dartmouth.

I shall send you postcards from there, if I have the chance, for it 's very historic. It will be Cornwall the day after, but I shall have to wire my next address.

With all the love of

YOUR MOORLAND PRINCESS.

P. S. You ought to have seen Emily and Mrs. Senter fussing over Sir Lionel when he burnt his hands! He hates being fussed over, and was almost cross, until our eyes happened to meet, and then we both smiled. That seemed to make him good-natured again. And he is wonderfully patient with his sister, really.

XVII

MRS. SENTER TO HER SISTER, MRS. BURDEN, AT GLEN LACHLAN, N. B.

White Hart Hotel, Launceston, Cornwall
Aug. 10th

My Dear Sis: It came off all right. My things usually do, don't they? With some women, it is only their lip-salve and face powder that come off. With me, it is plans. Luckily I inherited mamma's genius for high diplomacy, while you, alas, only came in for her rheumatism. And by the way, how *are* your poor dear bones? Not devilled, I hope? Do forgive the cheap wit. I am obliged to save my best things for Sir Lionel. He appreciates them highly, which is one comfort; but it is rather a strain living up to him (though I do think it will pay in the end), and in intercourse with my family I must be allowed to rest my brain. When everything is settled, one way or the other, my features, also, shall have repose. To keep young, every woman ought to go into retirement for at least one month out of the twelve, a fortnight at a time, perhaps, and do nothing but eat and sleep, see nobody, talk to nobody, think of nothing, and especially not *smile*. If one followed that regime religiously, with or without prayer and fasting, one need never have crow's-feet.

Of course, with you it is different. You have now

decided to live for Dick, and let your waist measure look after itself; but I have larger aims and fewer years than you, dearest. My conception of self-respecting widowhood is to be as young as possible, as attractive as possible, as rich as possible, and eventually to read my title clear to (at least) a baronet, and have a castle in a good hunting county. There are difficulties in my upward way, yet I feel strongly I shall overcome them. Let my motto be, "The battle to the smart, and the situation to the pretty." Why should n't I triumph on both counts? The ward, to be sure, is pretty, and is in the situation; but she does n't know her own advantages, and I 'm not sure she would marry Sir Lionel if he asked her; which at present he apparently has no intention of doing, although he admires her more warmly than either Dick or I think advisable in a guardian.

Since I wrote you last, just before starting on this motor match-making venture of ours, there have been several new developments. I don't know whether you are any deeper in Dick's confidence, in this affair, than I am (though I fancy not), but I scent a mystery. Dick really *has* detective talent, dear Sis, and if I were you, I should n't oppose his setting up as a sort of *art nouveau* Sherlock Holmes. Whether he has found out about some schoolgirl peccadillo of Miss Lethbridge's, and is dangling it over her head, Damocles sword fashion, I can't tell, because *he* won't tell; though he looks offensively wise when I tease him, and I have tried in vain, on my own account, to discover. But certain it is that he is either blackmailing her in a milk-and-water way, or hypnotizing her to obey his orders.

He hinted, you know, that he could get the girl to make Sir Lionel invite us to join the motoring party; but I supposed then that she had a weakness of the heart where my dear nephew was concerned. Now, my opinion is that she dislikes, yet fears him. Not very complimentary to Dick, but he does n't seem to mind, and is enjoying himself immensely in his own deliciously, impertinently, perky way. Somehow or other he has induced her to be more or less engaged to him, a temporary arrangement, I understand, but pleasing to him and convenient to me. What Dick gets out of it, I don't know, and don't enquire; but *I* get out of it the satisfaction of "shelving" the girl as a possible rival.

Sir Lionel, who (it 's useless to spare your motherly vanity!) has no very warm appreciation of Dick's qualities, is disgusted with his ward for encouraging D.'s advances, and is inclined to turn to me for sympathy. In that branch I am a great success, and altogether am getting on like a house afire. What if I do have to pump up an intelligent interest in politics in general, and affairs in the Far East in particular? I am fortunately so constituted that fifteen minutes' study of the *Times*, washed down by early tea (taken strong), enables me to discourse brilliantly on the deepest subjects during the day; and, thank goodness, virtue is rewarded in the evening with a little bridge. If I am ever Lady Pendragon (sounds well, does n't it?) it shall be all bridge and skittles, for me — and devil take politics, military science, history, the classics, Herbert Spencer, Robert Browning, Shakespeare, and all other boring or out-of-date things and writers (if he has n't already taken them)

on which I am now obliged to keep up a sort of Maxim-fire of conversation.

As to Dick's affairs, however, if the girl really is the heiress we thought her, I shall be only too glad to use my influence in every direction at once, to make the temporary arrangement a permanent one. But the worst of it is, I 'm not at all sure that she is any sort of an heiress.

Sir Lionel intimated to me the other night, when I was tactfully tickling him with hints, that she has little except what he may choose to give her. If that be true, I fear as Mrs. Dick her *dot* will not be large; but it strikes me as very probable that he was only trying to put me off — or rather, to put Dick off, if Dick were fortune-hunting. I don't know whether to believe his version or not, therefore; but I did get at one fact which may help us to find out for ourselves. Dear Ellaline is a daughter of *Frederic* Lethbridge. It was rather a shock to hear this, for I have a vague impression that there was once a scandal, quite a ripe, juicy scandal, about a Frederic Lethbridge. Can it have been this Frederic Lethbridge, and if so, had it anything to do with money matters?

I have n't mentioned my doubts to Dick, because he really is idiotically in love with the girl, and is capable of foolishness. I intend to let him go on as he is going for the present, as he can do himself no harm, and can do me a great deal of good, by keeping his darling out of my way and Sir Lionel's thoughts. But of course, he must n't be allowed to marry her if she has nothing of her own. Sir Lionel is rich, but not rich enough to make his ward rich enough for Dick, and keep plenty for his wife — when he gets one — if she be anything like *me*.

Your dear hostess, who would by this time be my hostess if I were n't otherwise engaged, knows everything and everybody. Not only that, she has done both for a considerable term of years. You remember the joke about her being torn between the desire not to exceed the age of forty-five and yet to boast a friendship with Lord Beaconsfield? Well, she can have known Frederic Lethbridge, and all about him, without being a day over forty, as that is Sir Lionel's age, and Mrs. Lethbridge was a distant relative of his.

Tell Lady MacRae that. Say that the Frederic Lethbridge you are inquiring about married a Miss de Nesville, and that there is a daughter in existence, a girl of nineteen. If Lady Mac does n't know anything, get her to ask her friends; but do hurry up for Dick's sake, there 's a dear, otherwise I shan't be able to pull the strings as you would like me to; and already my sweet nerves are jangled, out of tune. Dear Lady Mac is so adorably frank, when she has something disagreeable to say, that you 'll have no difficulty in ferreting out the truth — if it 's anything nasty. For most reasons I hope it is n't, as a rich girl would be a valuable bird in the hand for Dick; and I am on the spot to see his affairs as well as my own through, whatever happens.

For my part, if Sir Lionel were n't up to such a fatiguingly high level of intelligence, I believe I could fall in love with him. He may be descended from King Arthur, but he looks more like Lancelot, and I fancy might make love rather nicely, once he let himself go. Although it 's long since he did any soldiering, he shows that he *was* a soldier, born, not made. He has improved, if anything,

since we knew him in India, but I remember you used to be quite afraid of having to talk to him then, and preferred Colonel O'Hagan, whom you thought jolly and good-natured, though, somehow, I never got on with him very well. I always had the feeling he was trying to read me, and I do dislike that sort of thing in a man. It ruins human intercourse, and takes away all natural desire to flirt.

You ask me how I endure Emily Norton. Well, as I sit beside Sir Lionel in the car, I don't need to bother with her much in the daytime. She hates bridge, and thinks playing for money wrong in most circumstances, but considers it her duty to please her brother's guests; and as she never wins, anyhow, it need n't affect her conscience. I tell her that *I* always give my winnings to charity, and did n't think it necessary to add that, to my idea, charity should not only begin at home, but end there, unless its resources were unlimited. The poor, dull thing has that kind of self-conscious religion that sends her soul trotting every other minute to look in the glass, and see that it has n't smudged itself. So trying! Once she asked me what I did for *my* soul? I longed to tell her I took cod-liver oil, or Somebody's Fruit Salt, but did n't dare, on account of Sir Lionel. And she has such a conceited way of saying, when speaking of the future: "If the Lord spares me till next year, I will do so and so." As if He were in immediate need of her, but might be induced to get on without her for a short time!

One would know, by the way she screws up her hair, that she could never have felt a temptation. But I shall not let myself be troubled much with her if I marry Sir

Lionel. She can go back to her doctor and her curates, and be invited for Christmas to Graylees, which, by the way, I hope to inspect when we have finished this tour.

I am looking quite lovely in my motoring things, and enjoying myself very much, on the whole.

Devonshire I found too hot for this time of the year, but the scenery is pretty. I had no idea what a jolly little river the Dart is; and Dartmouth is rather quaint. For those who are keen on old things, I suppose the Butter Market would be interesting; but I can't really see why, because things happened in certain places hundreds of years ago, one should stand and stare at walls or windows, or fireplaces. The things *must* have happened somewhere! Although Charles the Second, for instance, may have been great fun to know, and one would have enjoyed flirting with him, now that he 's been dead and out of reach for ages, he 's of no importance to me.

We left Torquay yesterday, and arrived here in the evening, after a hilly but nice run, and lunching at Plymouth. Of course, a lot of nonsense was talked about Sir Francis Drake. One almost forgets *what* the old boy did, except to play bowls or something; but I have a way of seeming to know things, for which I deserve more credit than anyone (save you) would guess. When they were not jabbering about him at lunch, it was about the *Mayflower*, which apparently sailed from Plymouth for the purpose of supplying Americans with ancestors. I never met any Americans yet, except the kind who boast of having begun as shoeblacks, whose great-great-grandparents did n't cross in the *Mayflower*. It must have been

a huge ship, or else a lot of the ancestors went in the steerage, or were stewards or stowaways.

There was a ferry, getting from Devonshire into Cornwall, so of course we just missed a boat and had to wait half an hour. I was dying to go to sleep, but the others were as chirpy as possible, gabbling Cornish legends. When I say the "others," I mean Sir Lionel and Ellaline Lethbridge. I did n't know any legends, but I made up several on the spur of the moment, much more exciting than theirs, and that pleased Sir Lionel, as he is a Cornishman. Heavens, how I did take it out of myself admiring his native land when we 'd got across that ferry! Said the scenery was quite different from that of Devonshire, at the first go off; and I 'm not sure there *were n't* differences. The road coming toward Launceston really was romantic; rock-walled part of the way, with a lot of pink and yellow lichen; and again, fine open spaces with distant blue downs against a sky which looked, as I remarked to Sir Lionel, as if the gods had poured a libation of golden wine over it. Not bad, that, was it? I believe we passed an Arthurian battlefield, which naturally interested him immensely, therefore *had* to interest poor me! He seems to think there actually *was* an Arthur, and was quite pleased with me for saying that all the Cornish names of places rang with romance like fairy bells sounding from under the sea — perhaps from Atlantis. Anyhow, they 're a relief after such Devonshire horrors as Meavy and Hoo Meavy, which are like the lisping of babies. Sir Lionel thought the "derivations" of such names an absorbing subject! But living in the East so long has made him quixotically patriotic.

Here and there we passed a whole villageful of white-washed cottages, with purplish-brown moss covering their roofs — rather picturesque; and some of the slate-roofed, stone houses are nice in their way, too; I suppose distinctively Cornish. Not that I care! I 'm glad Graylees Castle is n't in Cornwall, which is *much* too far from town.

There were some mine-shafts about, to mar the scenery, toward the end of the journey, and the road surface was bad compared to what we 've had. If the car were n't a very good one, we should have suffered from the bumps. Ellaline Lethbridge, by the way, said something about Cornwall which puzzled me. Suddenly she exclaimed: "Why, the atmosphere here is like Spain! Everything swims in a sea of coloured lights!" *I* thought she 'd spent all her life at school in France, and I mentioned the impression, upon which she replied, with an air of being taken aback: "I mean, from what I have *heard* of Spain." Can she have had an escapade, I wonder? But that is Dick's business, not mine — at present.

There 's a castle in Launceston, which has kept us over to-day, as Sir Lionel has been in these parts before, and can't rest unless we see everything he admired in his youth. I wish he had n't seen so much, there 'd be less for us to do. I *hate* pottering about, seeing sights in the rain, and it has been trying to rain all day. It 's well enough to say that the rain rains alike on the just and the unjust, but that is not true, as some women's hair curls naturally. Ellaline's does, and mine does n't — except the part I owe for at Truefitt's.

It 's an old hotel that we 're in, quite pleased to show its age; and I have made rather a beast of myself with some

sort of Cornish pasty, which, it seems, is a local favourite, and spoils the peasants' teeth. Cornish cream is good, and, I understand from Sir Lionel, was invented by the Phoenicians. I suppose they drowned their sorrows in it while working in the tin mines one always associates with them.

We go to Tintagel to-morrow, and do some other Cornish things, I don't know what. But write to me at Bideford, as we shall be back in Devonshire in a few days on our way — I fancy — toward Wales. I long to hear what you or Lady Mac may have up your sleeves about the dear Ellaline's papa.

Ever your affectionate

GWEN.

Dick sends his love, and will write.

XVIII

MRS. SENTER TO HER SISTER, MRS. BURDEN

King Arthur's Castle, Tintagel
Aug. 12th

My Dear Sis: I 'm sorry I told you to write to Bideford, as we 're stopping at this place several days, and I might have had your answer here. However, it 's too late now, as by this time your letter is in the post, perhaps, and we may or may not leave to-morrow. I think I can be pretty sure your wire to Dick means that you 'd heard from me, and that the news for him is not favourable. If he guessed that I 'd been questioning you about the eligibility of his girl, frankly I doubt if he 'd have swallowed the bait of your telegram. Even as it was he seemed restive, and did n't yearn to be packed off to Scotland, even for a few days. However, he 'd committed himself by reading your message aloud, before he stopped to think; and when Sir Lionel and Ellaline had learned that you were ill, and wanted him, they would have been shocked if he 'd refused to go. I comforted him by promising to sow strife between ward and guardian, as often and diligently as possible, until he can get back to look after his own interests, and I shall do my best to keep the promise — not for Dick's sake alone.

He was off within an hour after the telegram, a little

sulky, but not too worried, as he has the faith engendered by experience in your recuperative powers. I, naturally, worry still less, as I have a clue to the mystery of your attack which Dick does n't possess. I quite believe that by the time he reaches your side it will no longer be a bedside, but a sofaside; that you 'll be able to smile, hold Dick's hand, and replace Benger's Food with slices of partridge and sips of champagne. By the way, this is the glorious Twelfth. It does seem odd and frumpish not to be in Scotland, but motoring covers a multitude of social sins. Not a word has been said about birds. Our sporting talk is of mufflers, pinions, water-cooled brakes, and chainless drives.

The Tyndals have turned up at this hotel, more gorgeous and more bored than ever, but they have taken a fancy to Ellaline Lethbridge, and I am playing it for all it 's worth. It comes in handy at the moment, and I have no conscientious scruples against using millionaires for pawns. They have an impossibly luxurious motor-car. Sir Lionel thinks it vulgar, but they are pleased with it, as it 's still a new toy. I have been making a nice little plan for them, which concerns Ellaline. None of them know it yet, but they will soon, and if it had been invented to please Dick (which it was n't entirely) it could n't suit him better. You may tell him that, if by any chance he 's with you still when you get this.

My mind is busy working the plan out, so that there may be no hitch, but a few unoccupied corners of my brain are wondering what you have discovered about Miss Lethbridge's prospects and antecedents; how, if both are very undesirable, you intend to persuade Dick to let her drop.

If I were you I would n't waste arguments. Retain him a few days if you can, though I fear the only way to do so is to have a fit. I believe that can be arranged by eating soap and frothing at the mouth, which produces a striking effect, and, though slightly disagreeable, is n't dangerous. But seriously, if he refuses to hear reason, don't worry. I am on the spot to snatch him at the last moment from the mouth of the lionness, provided she opens it wide enough to swallow him.

Your ever useful and affectionate sister,

GWEN.

P. S. The Tyndals have got a cousin of George's with them, a budding millionaire from Eton, who has fallen in love at sight with the Lethbridge. But even Dick can't be jealous of childhood, and it may be helpful.

Taking everything together, I am enjoying myself here, though I 'm impatient to get your letter. Cornwall agrees with Sir Lionel's disposition, and he is being delightful to everyone. I think while he is in the right mood I shall repeat to him what a sad failure my marriage was, and how little I really care for gaiety; "Society my lover, solitude my husband," sort of thing. He is the kind of man to like that, and the sweet, soft air of Cornwall is conducive to credulity.

XIX

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

King Arthur's Castle, Tintagel
August 12th

MOST DEAR AND SOVRAN LADY: I call you that because I 've just been reading Sir Thomas Malory's "Le Morte d'Arthur" (is that Old French spelling?), and because the style of address seems suitable to King Arthur's Castle — which is n't really his castle, you know, but an hotel. I thought it was the castle, though, when I first saw it standing up gray and massive on an imposing hill. I supposed it had been restored, and was rather disappointed to find it an hotel — though it 's very jolly to live in, with all the latest feudal improvements and fittings, and King Arthur's Round Table in the enormous entrance-hall.

Sir Lionel would n't let Mrs. Senter laugh at me for thinking it the real castle, but said it was a natural mistake for a girl who had spent all her life in a French school — and how should I know the difference? I *was* grateful to him, for though I love to have some people laugh at me she is n't one of those people. She laughs in that sniffy way cats have.

The real castle I can see from my own feudal, castellated balcony. It is beautifully ruined; but you can go into it,

and I have been. Only I want to tell you about other things first.

In my short note from Launceston, did I mention the old Norman house which belongs to cousins of Sir Lionel's? He used to visit there, and poke about in the castle, which was Godwin's and Harold's before the Conquest. But the nicest cousins are dead and the rest are away, so we could only see the outside of the house. However, we went to call at an ancient stone cottage of the colour of petrified wallflowers, to see a servant who took care of Sir Lionel when he was a child. A wonderful old wisp of a thing, with the reputation of being a witch, which wins her great respect; and she used quaint Cornish words that have come down from generation to generation, ever since the early Celts, without changing. When Sir Lionel sympathized with her about her husband's death, she said it was a grief, but he 'd been a sad invalid, and a "good bit in the way of the oven" for several years.

On the way to Tintagel from Launceston we passed Slaughter Bridge, one of the many places where legend says King Arthur fought his last battle. So that was a good entrance to Arthurian country, was n't it? Our road cut huge, rolling downs in two, and they surged up on either side, so it was rather like the passage through the Red Sea. And under a sky that hung over us like an illimitable bluebell, we saw our first Cornish mountains, Rough Tor and Brown Willy. Names of that sort make you feel at home with mountains at once, as if you 'd known them all your life, and might lead them about with a string. But they are only corruptions of old Celtic names that nobody could possibly pronounce; and nearly

In Sir Lionel's county, Cornwall

everything seems more or less Celtic in Cornwall, especially eyes. They are beautiful gray-blue, with their black lashes as long on the lower as on the upper lid, and look as if they had been "rubbed in with a dirty finger." Now I see that Sir Lionel's eyes are Celtic. I did n't know quite how to account for them at first. *He* has a temper, I think, and could be severe; but he says the Cornish people are so good-hearted that if you ask them the way anywhere, they tell you the one they think you would prefer to take, whether it 's really right or not. But I 'm glad he is not so easy going as that.

It was exciting to wheel into a little road like a lane, marked "Tintagel"! I felt my copy of "Le Morte d'Arthur" turning in my hand, like a water-diviner's rod. We took the lane to avoid a tremendous hill, because hills give Mrs. Norton the "creeps" in her feet and back hair, and she never recovers until she has had tea. But it was a charming lane, with views by and by of wide, purple moorland, sunset-red with new heather; and the sky had turned from bluebell azure to green and rose, in a wonderful, chameleon way, which it seems that the sky has in Cornwall. I suppose it was a Celtic habit! All about us billowed a profusion of wild beauty; and though for a long time there was nothing alive in sight except a flock of bright pink sheep, my stage-managing fancy called up knights of the round table, "pricking" o'er the downs on their panoplied steeds to the rescue of fair, distressed damsels. And the bright mirrors which the fleeting rain had dropped along the road were the knights' polished shields, laid down to save the ladies from wetting the points of their jewelled slippers.

Then came my first sight of the Cornish sea, deep hyacinth, with golden sails scattered upon it, and Arthur's cliffs rising dark out of its satin sheen. Beyond, in the background, gray houses and cottages grouped together, the stone and slates worn shiny with age, like very old marble, so that they reflected glints of colour from the rose and violet sky.

By the time I was dressed for dinner it was sunset, and I went to sit on the terrace and watch the splendid cloud pageant. I seemed to be the only one of our party who had come down yet, though, to tell the whole, *whole* truth, I had had a sneaking idea Sir Lionel would perhaps be strolling about with a cigarette, looking nice and slim, and young, and soldierly in his dinner jacket. He is nicer to look at in that than in almost anything else, I think, as most Englishmen are.

He was n't there, however, so I had to admire his Cornish sunset without him. And I had such fine thoughts about it, too! — at least they seemed fine to me; and if I were n't quite a congenial friend of my own it would have seemed a waste of good material to lavish them on myself alone.

I saw through the open door of the sunset, into Arthur's kingdom, where he still rules, you know, and is lord of all. The whole west was a Field-of-the-Cloth-of-Gold, and across the blaze of golden glory rode dark shapes of cloud, purple and crimson, violet and black. They were Arthur's knights tilting in tournament, while the Queen of Beauty and her attendant ladies looked on. Now and then, as I watched, a knight fell, and a horse tore away riderless, his gold-'broidered trappings floating on the wind. When

this happened, out of the illumined sea would writhe a glittering dragon, or scaly heraldic beast, to prance or fly along the horizon after the vanishing charger of the fallen knight. Sometimes the rushing steed would swim to a fairy island or siren-rock that floated silver-pale on the shining water, or jutted dark out of a creamy line of breakers; and though I knew that the knights and ladies and wondrous animals were but inhabitants of Sunset Kingdom, Limited, and that the glimmering islands and jagged rocks would dissolve by and by into cloud-wreaths, they all looked as real as the long tongue of land beyond which North Devon crouched hiding. And the colour flamed so fiercely in the sky that I was half afraid the sun must be on fire.

As I sat there watching the last of the knights ride away, three people came out of the hotel and stood on the terrace. I just gave them one glance, and went back to the sunset, but somehow I got the feeling that they were looking at me, and talking about me.

Presently they began to walk up and down, and as they passed in front of my seat, they turned an interested gaze upon me. All I had known about them until then was that they were a trio: a man, a woman, and a boy, with conventional backs; but as they turned, I recognized the man and the woman.

You would never guess who they were, so I 'll tell you. Do you remember the people for whom you talked Italian at Venice four years and a half ago, the day we arrived, and there was a strike, and no porters to carry anybody's luggage? Well, here they were at Tintagel! I was perfectly certain of this in an instant, and I realized why they were

so interested in me. They thought they had seen me before, but perhaps were not sure.

Anyway, they walked on, and only the boy looked back. He was dressed in Eton clothes, and was exactly like all other boys, except that he had mischievous eyes and a bored mouth — almost as dangerous a combination in a boy, I should think, as a box of matches and a barrel of gunpowder.

I thought that he was probably their son, and that, as he had nothing better to do, he was wondering about me. I would have given a lot to know what they were saying, and whether Venice was in their minds or not, but I could do nothing except hope they might not place me mentally. I would n't get up and go in, because that would have been too cowardly; and besides, if they were staying in the hotel, I should certainly run up against them afterward.

I had just decided to face it out, and had put on a forbidding expression, when along came Sir Lionel, so I had to take off the expression and fold it away for future emergencies. He was smoking one of those cigarettes which go so well with sunsets, and he had seen the King Arthur sky-tournament from the other side of the house. He said he had not supposed I should be down so soon, but was hoping that I had n't missed the show, wherever I was. He threw away his cigarette — which is one of his old-fashioned tricks if he sees a woman, never even waiting to know if she minds — and asked if he might sit on the seat by me. That was old-fashioned, too, was n't it? The Dick Burdens of the world plump themselves down by girls without worrying to get permission. They think

female things will be too flattered for words, by a condescending male desire to be near them.

I told you how nice Sir Lionel looks in evening clothes, did n't I? You 've no idea what a perfect shape his head is; and a large lake of white shirt under a little black silk bow is particularly becoming to a clean-shaven man with a very tanned skin — though I don't know why. One would think it might have the opposite effect. And Sir Lionel does tie his necktie so nicely, with a kind of careless precision which comes right of itself, like everything he does. (You will think all this is silly, and it is; but I keep noticing things about him, and liking them, so I tell you, because I may have prejudiced you against him at first, as Ellaline prejudiced me.)

We were beginning to have a good talk about Cornwall, and quaint Cornish ways and superstitions, when out of the house came Mrs. Senter. The Venice people had just passed again, and were near the hotel door as she appeared.

"Why, Sallie and George!" she exclaimed.

And "Why, Gwen!" the Venice lady answered.

They shook hands, the boy and all, and though Sir Lionel did n't pay much attention to what was going on, I could n't keep up our conversation. "Suppose they tell Mrs. Senter they met me in Venice!" I said to myself. "What *shall* I do?"

Out of one corner of my eye I saw that they did speak of me, and she threw a quick, eager glance in my direction. A minute or two later they all strolled on together, until they had come in front of our seat. There Mrs. Senter paused, and said, "Sir Lionel, these are my friends, Mr.

and Mrs. Tyndal, of whom I think I must have spoken to you, and this is their cousin, Mr. Tom Tyndal. They are touring in their motor, and arrived here this afternoon, a little before us. Quite a coincidence, is n't it?" And then, as if on second thoughts, she added me to the introduction.

"Quite a coincidence," indeed! It never rains, but it pours coincidences, on any head that is developing a criminal record.

The Tyndals paid Sir Lionel compliments, and seemed to be delighted to meet him, evidently regarding him as a great celebrity, which, I suppose, he really is. Then, when they had made him sufficiently uncomfortable (compliments are to him what a sudden plague of locusts would be to most men), they turned to me.

"Surely we have met before, Miss Lethbridge?" remarked Mrs. Tyndal. And you ought to have seen how Mrs. Senter's features sharpened, as she waited for me to stammer or blush.

As far as the blush was concerned, she had her money's worth; and I only did n't stammer because I was obliged to stop and think before replying. I almost worshipped Sir Lionel when he answered for me, in a quick, positive way he has, which there seems no gainsaying. I suppose men who live in the East cultivate that, as it keeps natives from arguing and answering back.

"Impossible," said he, "unless it was at Versailles, where my ward has been at school since she was a very small child, with no holidays except at St. Cloud."

"Might n't it have been at Paris?" obligingly suggested

Mrs. Senter, determined I should n't be let off, if conviction of any sort were possible.

"No, I don't think it was at Paris," murmured Mrs. Tyndal, reflectively, eyeing me in the sunset light, which was turning to pure amethyst. "Now, where *could* it have been? I seem to associate your face with — with Italy."

Oh, my goodness! She *was* getting "warm" in our game of "hide the handkerchief."

"She has never been to Italy," said Sir Lionel, beginning to look rather cross, as if Mrs. Tyndal were taking liberties with his belongings — of which, you see, he thinks me one.

"Not even — Venice?" she persisted. "Oh, yes, *that* is it! Now I know where I seem to have seen you — at Venice. You remember, don't you, George?"

By this time sparks had lighted up in Sir Lionel's eyes, as if he were a Turk, and one of the ladies of his harem were unjustly suspected.

"It is impossible for Mr. Tyndal to remember what did n't happen," he said, dropping a lump of ice into his voice. "You saw someone who looked like her in Venice, perhaps, but not my ward."

I was almost sorry for the poor Tyndals, who meant no harm, though they had the air of being so frightfully rich and prosperous that it seemed ridiculous to pity them.

"Of course, it could only have been a resemblance," said Mr. Tyndal, with that snubby glare at Mrs. Tyndal which husbands and wives keep for each other.

"It must have been," she responded, taking up her

cue; for naturally they did n't want to begin their acquaintance with a distinguished person by offending him.

These signs of docility caused Sir Lionel to relent and come down off his high horse. Whenever he has been at all haughty or impatient with his sister (whose denseness would sometimes try a saint) he is sorry in a minute, and tries to be extra nice. It was the same now in the case of the poor Tyndals, whose Etonian cousin had all the time been gazing up at him with awed adoration, as of a hero on a pedestal; and suddenly a quaint thought struck me. I remembered about the Bengalese Sir Lionel was supposed to have executed for some offence or other, and I could see him being sorry immediately afterward, tearing around trying to stick their heads on again, and saying pleasant words.

Well, he stuck the Tyndals' heads on very kindly, so that they almost forgot they 'd ever been slashed off; and when Mrs. Norton came out, which she did in a few minutes, looking as if she 'd washed the dust off her face with kitchen soap, we all strolled up and down together, till it was time for dinner.

Mrs. Tyndal walked with me, but not a word did she say about Venice. That subject was to be tabooed, but I 'm far from sure she was convinced of her mistake, and she could n't overcome her intense interest in my features. However, she seems good-natured, as if even to please Mrs. Senter she would n't care to do me a bad turn. Only, I don't think people do things from motives as a rule, do you? They just suddenly find they want to do them, and presto, the things are done! That 's why the world 's so exciting.

We chatted non-committally of cabbages and kings

and automobiles; and I recalled tracing pneu-tracks like illusive lights and shadows before us on the damp road, as we spun into Tintagel. No doubt they were the pneus of the Tyndals.

Their table was next ours in the dining room, so close that motor-chat was tossed back and forth, and it appeared that Mr. Tyndal was as proud of his car as a cat of its mouse. Mrs. Tyndal's mice are her jewels, and she has droves of them, which she displayed at dinner. Afterward she did lace-work, which made her rings gleam beautifully, and she said she did n't particularly like doing it, but it was something to "kill time." How awful! But I suppose frightfully rich people are like that. They sometimes get fatty degeneration of the soul.

Well, nothing more happened that evening, except that the Tyndal boy and I made great friends — quite a nice boy, pining for some mischief that idle hands might do; and his cousins said that, as we were going to stop several days at Tintagel, "making it a centre," they would stop, too. Sir Lionel did n't appear overjoyed at the decision, but Mrs. Senter seemed glad. She and her sister, Mrs. Burden, have known the Tyndals for years, and are by way of being friends, yet she works off her little fire-work epigrams against them when their backs are turned, as she does on everybody. According to her, their principal charm for society in London is their cook; and she says the art treasures in their house are all illegitimate; near-Gobelin, not-quite-Raphaels, and so on She makes Sir Lionel smile; but I wonder if she 'd adopt this cheap method if he 'd ever mentioned to her (as he has to me) that of all meannesses he despises disloyalty?

The Tyndal boy went up to bed before the rest of us, and when Sir Lionel and Mrs. Norton had been forced to play bridge with Mrs. Senter and Mr. Tyndal, I slipped away, too.

We 'd lived in the hotel such a short time, and it 's so big, that I counted on recognizing my room by the boots which I put outside the door when I went down to sunset and dinner. Of course, I 'd forgotten my number, as I always do. I would n't consider myself a normal girl if I did n't.

There were the boots, not taken away yet — looking abject, as boots do in such situations — but I was pleased to see that they compared favourably in size with the gray alligator-skin and patent leather eccentricities of Mrs. Senter, reposing on an adjacent doormat. With this frivolous reflection in my mind, it did n't occur to me, as I turned the handle of the door marked by my brown footgear, that the room now appeared farther to the left, along the passage, than I had the impression of its being. I opened the door, which was not locked, walked in, felt about for the electric light, switched it on, and had sauntered over to a table in the centre of the room before I noticed anything strange. Then, to my startled vision appeared unfamiliar brushes and combs on a chest of drawers; beautiful, but manly looking silver-backed ones; and along the wall was a row of flat tweed legs, on stretchers.

For an instant I stood still, bewildered, as if I 'd walked into a dream, beguiled by a false clue of boots; and during my few seconds of temporary aberration my dazed eyes fell upon a book which lay on the table. It was Sir

Lionel's "Morte d' Arthur" (second volume; he 's lent me the first), and in it for a marker was a *glove of mine.* I 'd lost it at Torquay, after we had our dear, good talk, and he knew I was looking for it, all about the sitting room we had at the hotel there, yet he never said a word.

Oh, dear little French mother, you can't think what an odd feeling it gave me to see he had kept my glove, and had put it in his book! Yes, I believe you *can* think, too, because probably you 've felt just like that yourself when you were a girl, only you never thought it *convenable* to describe your symptoms for your daughter's benefit. I know it was perfectly schoolgirlish of me, and I ought to have outgrown such sentimentality with my teens; but if you could see Sir Lionel, and understand the sort of man he is, you would n't think me so outrageous. That he — he, of all men — should care to keep anything which would remind him of an insignificant child like me! I 'm afraid there came a prickly feeling in my eyelids, and I had the most idiotic desire to kiss the book, which I knew would have a nice smell of his cigarettes, because my borrowed volume has. Of course, I would n't have done it for anything, though, so don't think I 'm worse than I am. And really, really, I don't believe I 'm exactly in love. I hope I 'm not so foolish. It 's just a kind of infatuated fascination of a moth — not for a candle, but for a great, brilliant motor lamp. I 've seen them at night dashing themselves against the glass of our Bleriots once or twice when we 've been out late, and I know how hopelessly they smash their soft, silly wings. I should have been like them if I 'd kissed the book; but instead, after that one look which told me the glove really was *my* glove, I

bounced out of the room, snatching my boots up as I dashed across the threshold.

Bump! as I did so I almost telescoped with Sir Lionel who had retrieved his boots, probably from my doormat. And at the same moment came a boyish yelp from somewhere, followed by the smart slap of a door shutting. I wished it had been a smart slap of my hand on the Tyndal boy's ear, for of course the boot-changing was that little fiend's work, I guessed in a second.

So did Sir Lionel, and we both laughed — at ourselves, at each other, and everything. It seems that the Youthful Horror had changed every pair of boots along the corridor, and made the most weird combinations. I don't suppose Sir Lionel thought about the glove in the book, anyway at the time, and luckily there was nothing tell-tale in my room, in case he strayed in, except your photograph in the silver frame you gave me on my last birthday. And of course he could make nothing of that.

He had got out of playing bridge, because when Mrs. Tyndal saw he was n't keen, she offered to take a hand, and he said he did want to write to a man in Bengal, his best friend.

We talked to each other only a few minutes, after the boot-puzzle had been put right; but would you believe it, up came Mrs. Senter, while Sir Lionel and I were bidding each other good night in front of my door? She looked as stiff and wicked as a frozen snake for an instant; then she smiled too sweetly, and said she 'd come for her Spanish lace mantilla. But I almost know she had fancied that Sir Lionel might have made an excuse to get a word with me, and had flown up to find out for herself.

You can imagine, dear, that I did n't feel much like going to bed when I 'd finished saying good-night, and shut my door upon the world. It seemed to me that this birthplace of Sir Lionel's ancestor, King Arthur Pendragon, was too romantic and wonderful to go tamely to sleep in. And what was my covered balcony for, if not to dream dreams and think thoughts, by moonlight?

So I switched off the electricity in my room, and went out to find that the moon (which is big and grand now) had come out, too, tearing apart a great black cloud in order to look down on Arthur-land, and see if she had any adorers. Anyway, she must have seen me, for she turned the night into silver dawn, so clear and bright that she could n't have missed me if she tried.

I did wish for you to be with me then, and I 'm ashamed to confess I would n't have minded Sir Lionel as a companion, because Tintagel seems so much more his than mine.

Never did I hear the sea talk poetry and legend as it does round those dark rocks of old "Dundagel." I thought as I leaned out from my balcony, a lonely, unappreciated Juliet — that the sound was like the chanting voice of an ancient bard, telling stories of the golden days to himself or to all who might care to listen. I fancied I could hear the words:

> They found a naked child upon the sands
> Of dark Dundagel by the Cornish sea.

I could see the ruined castle, on its twin cliffs, below the hotel-castle cliff and between me and the sea; and the very meagreness of what remains seemed to increase the interest and mystery by stimulating the imagination, forcing it to create its own pictures. I "reconstructed"

the castle, building it of the same stone they use now at Tintagel, and have used for the last thousand years or so: a dark stone, singularly rich with colour — pansy and wallflower colour, with splashes of green flung on to dead gray, like bright autumn leaves stirred into a heap of other leaves dim and dead. And the mortar for my masonry was the moonlight which flooded the sea and those wide downs whose divisions into fields turned them into enormous maps.

I worked myself up into such a romantic mood that I almost cried in the joy and pain of living, and expected to look back upon myself with the "utmost spurn" when I should come back to real life after a good sleep in the morning. But I did n't, — perhaps because, instead of encouraging the good sleep, I lay and listened to the wild song of the Cornish wind.

I waked early, feeling exactly the same, if not more so, and could hardly wait to get down into the ruins of the old castle. I splashed about in a cold bath, dressed as quickly as a well-groomed girl can, and then — I committed what might seem an indiscreet act if the last of the Pendragons and I did not stand toward each other in the place of guardian and ward. "Nothing is, but thinking makes it so." And Sir Lionel certainly does think we 're in those positions; therefore it was all right for me to knock at his door, and ask through the keyhole if he would very, very much mind taking me to the castle?

He was dressed, and opened the door instantly. It was the one thing he would have liked to propose, said he, only he had been afraid of disturbing me so early. Was n't that kind of him? I remembered the glove, and

the thought of it was more delicious than a breakfast of Cornish cream and honey; although, of course, lurking in the background of my mind was the horrid idea that he might have accidentally picked the thing up to use as a bookmark. And another idea, gloomier even, though not so horrid, was that, even if he does like me well enough to keep things of mine, he must soon grow to hate me when he knows who I am.

He suggested coffee, but I would n't have it, because I was afraid Mrs. Senter might appear and want to go to the castle too. I had visions of her, hearing our voices in the corridor, and dashing out of bed to fling on her clothes; but even if she did overhear the whole conversation, I don't think she 's the kind who looks her best before breakfast, if she has dressed in a hurry; and anyway, we were spared the apparition.

It was a fine scramble getting to the ruins, and when Sir Lionel had opened a door (with a key you get from a cottage close by the sea) it was quite as if he were my host, entertaining me in his ancestral home. I told him that it felt twice as interesting to be there with a true Pendragon, than with a mere king or anybody like that, and he seemed pleased.

"I *hope* I am a 'true' Pendragon," he said, rather thoughtfully. "One must try to be — always." He looked at me very, very kindly, as if he would have liked to say something more; but he did n't speak, and turned away his eyes to look far over the sea. It was only for a little while, though, that he was absent-minded. Sitting there on the rough, wind-blown grass which is the floor of the castle now, he told me things about the place and its history.

How Dundagel meant the "Safe Castle," and how the "Arthurian believers" say it was built by the Britons in earliest Roman days; how David Bruce of Wales was entertained by the Earl of Cornwall on the very spot where we were sitting, and how the great hall, once famous, was destroyed as long ago as when Chaucer was a baby. And as he talked, the rising wind wailed and sobbed like old, old witches crying over the evil fallen on Arthur and his castle. Such an old, wise-sounding wind it was, old enough to have been blowing when Arthur was a baby, drowning the lullabies sung by his mother Igerna, "that greatest beauty in Britain."

We forgot breakfast, and stopped in the ruins a long time, until suddenly we both realized that we were desperately hungry. But instead of going up to our own hotel, we walked into the quaint village (whose real name is Trevena, though nobody calls it that) and had something to eat at a hotel where Sir Lionel used to stop occasionally when he was a boy. Afterward, we went to see the village schoolmaster, whom he knew; such a nice man, who paints pictures as well as teaches the children — and I felt guilty at being introduced as Sir Lionel's "ward." I think my conscience is like a bruised peach, pinched by many fingers to see if it 's ripe, I have that guilty feeling so often! When we spoke of the schoolmaster's versatility, he laughed and said it was "nothing to his predecessor's," who used to cut the children's hair, clip horses, measure land, act as parish clerk as well as teacher, pull teeth, and beat such transgressors as had to be punished in a way less serious than prison. Does n't that take one back to long ago? But so does everything in Tintagel — and all

over Cornwall, Sir Lionel says. They have such nice old-fashioned words here! Is n't "jingle" good? It 's some kind of a conveyance, exactly the opposite of a motor-car, I fancy, from the description. And I like the word "huer," too. It means a man who gives the hue and cry when the pilchards are coming in, and all the fishermen must run to the sea.

I should like to know everything about Cornwall, from the smugglers, and the famous wrestlers, to the witches — the last of whom lives near Boscastle still. But the little that travellers in motors can learn about places steeped in history, is like trying to know all about a beautiful great tree by one leaf of flying gold which falls into the automobile as it sweeps by, along the road. Still, the little one does learn is unforgettable, impressed upon the mind in a different way from the mere *learning*. And I suppose few people know everything about every place, even in their own countries. If they did, I 'm sure they 'd be prigs, and no one would want to know *them!*

When we got back to our hotel castle on the cliff, the Tyndals' motor was at the door, a huge, gorgeous chariot, and nothing would do but we must "try the car." Mrs. Senter had promised to go, and was putting on her hat.

The Tyndals are difficult people to resist, because if you try to make excuses they pin you down in one way or another, so that you must either do what they want or hurt their feelings; and though Sir Lionel is supposed to have been so strict in Bengal, he is quite soft-hearted in England. I think he hates going about in motors that are n't his, because he enjoys being the man at the helm, which is perhaps characteristic of him; however, the Tyndals

swept all of us, except Mrs. Norton, away to Delabole to see the slate quarries, and to have the adventure of sliding down a fearfully steep incline in a tiny trolley-car — if that 's the right word for it. I half expected Charon to meet me with his ferry-boat at the bottom. It would n't have seemed much stranger than other things in Cornwall.

All that happened yesterday. To-day we have been to Trebarwith Strand and Port Isaac, and have walked to the loneliest church I ever saw, with the gravestones in the burying ground propped by buttresses, that the wind may n't throw them down. It is Tintagel church, though it 's a good long way from the village, and the vicarage is of the fourteenth century.

Oh, and I heard a splendid legend about the ruined castle from the vicar, who is its warden! It seems, when it was built by the old princes of West Wales — very beautiful as well as strong, with walls "painted of many colours," it was placed under a powerful spell by Merlin, that it might become invisible twice in every year. How I should like to be at Tintagel at the right time, and see if the ruins would disappear from before my eyes. I believe they would; and the enchantment would take the form of a sea mist.

To-morrow we are to leave Cornwall for Bideford.

I had got as far as that, when Mrs. Senter knocked at my door, and asked if she might come in for a few minutes; so I had to say yes, and "smile full well in counterfeited glee." But I hated to be interrupted, as there was just time before dressing for dinner to finish my letter to you.

Now it is after dinner, and before I go to bed, I 'll tell you what has happened.

How conceited I was to suppose it possible that Sir Lionel thought me an important person! I am sure the glove episode must have been a mere accident. Serves me right!

Mrs. Senter came to tell me that they 'd all been talking about the way to Bideford, and Sir Lionel said the road was so hilly, he wished we had n't quite as many passengers in the car. Then the Tyndals asked if they might take me, because they 'd made up their minds to go to Bideford too, and Sir Lionel answered that it would be a splendid way out of the difficulty if I were willing. The only trouble was, he did n't like to propose such a thing for fear of hurting my feelings; and the conversation ended, according to Mrs. Senter, by the Tyndals planning to suggest the idea to me as if it were their own, then letting the matter rest on my decision.

Mrs. Senter went on to explain that Sir Lionel did n't know she was repeating to me what had passed, but that she thought I would prefer to know. "I 'm sure *I* should if I were in your place," she purred sweetly. "When the Tyndals invite you, of course you must do exactly as you please; but don't you think for Mrs. Norton's sake, as she 's such a coward, it would be best to keep the car as light as possible, since Sir Lionel fears the roads are really bad?"

"Oh, certainly," said I, trying so hard not to blush that I must have been purple. "I shall be delighted to go with Mr. and Mrs. Tyndal, in their lovely car, and it 's very nice of them to ask me."

"You *won't* tell Sir Lionel I interfered, will you?" she begged. "I should be quite afraid of him if he were angry."

"You need n't worry. He shan't hear anything from me," said I.

"And you do think I was right to let you know?" she implored.

"Of course," I assured her. But I was feeling hurt all the way up to my topmost hair and down to my tipmost toe. Not that I mind going with the Tyndals, but that Sir Lionel should pick *me* out as the bit of superfluous ballast to cast to the winds! That was what made me feel cold and old, and alone in the world. I conscientiously told myself that I was the youngest of the party, and the right one to sacrifice; but nothing was much comfort until the thought jumped into my head that maybe Mrs. Senter had fibbed. I went to dinner buoyed up by that hope, but it died young; for the Tyndals *did* invite me, in Sir Lionel's hearing; and when I said that I should be charmed — he smiled calmly. So far from making objections, I thought he looked quite pleased.

Poor me! I fancied in the castle ruins that he actually liked my society. But I forgot that I 'd invited him to go with me. *I shan't forget again.* And *hang* the glove!

Your poor, foolish, conceited, humiliated

AUDRIE.

XX

TELEGRAM FROM DICK BURDEN TO HIS AUNT

Glen Lachlan, August 13th
8 o'clock A.M.

SENTER, KING ARTHUR'S CASTLE, TINTAGEL, CORNWALL:

Returning to-day. Hope find you still at Tintagel. Try and make Pendragon stay if he plans to leave. Find some excuse.

DICK.

XXI

TELEGRAM FROM MRS. SENTER TO HER NEPHEW

Tintagel, August 13th, 9.20 A.M.

R. Burden, Glen Lachlan, N. B.

Just starting for Bideford. Can make no excuse to delay, but have done better. If you arrive Tintagel to-night will find member of party most important to you still there. Better hurry. Will leave letter explaining all.

Senter.

XXII

LETTER LEFT BY MRS. SENTER AT KING ARTHUR'S CASTLE HOTEL, FOR HER NEPHEW, DICK BURDEN

August 13th

Dear Dick: Your wire has just come as we are starting. I 've telegraphed, and will leave a few words for you in pencil. Lucky you have a resourceful relative, and that Mrs. Norton's washing did n't come till late this morning! My resourcefulness enables me to change my plans for your benefit, or rather, to make them work together for your good, in the time most women take to change their minds; while the lateness of Mrs. N.'s washing and her mild obstinacy in determining to wait for it, against her brother's wishes, provide us with a few extra minutes.

Now it suddenly appears that Young Nick has n't enough petrol to get on as far as — anywhere. That will give us more minutes. Brown Buddha, as your adored one calls him, has crawled humbly but swiftly off to obtain a new supply. Sir Lionel, already in a vile temper for reasons which I may have time to explain, is bursting with rage to which he is too proud to give a natural outlet. He looks ready to explode, not with bombs, but with dambs. I have never heard him say

a single one, during the whole of our acquaintance, but his eyes are sending out a fiery cataract of them this minute. A good thing for me he does n't know what I know, or the fire would be turned upon me, and I should wither like "She" in her second bath.

Quickly I 'll tell you what I 've done, and why Sir Lionel is wild; also how I 've rearranged everything and everybody at the last minute, in order to satisfy you. What a precious darling aunt you have got, to be sure, and what a lot you do owe her!

For motives of my own, I planned to transplant your sweet Ellaline from our motor-car to the motor-car of others for the day. The "others" are George and Sallie Tyndal, about whose sudden, apropos appearance I wrote your mother only yesterday; but, of course, as you 're leaving to-day you 'll miss the news in that letter. I thought your anxiety for your parent's health would hardly be poignant enough to keep you in Scotland long, but I did n't suppose you 'd be able to tear yourself away *quite* so soon.

I don't doubt you wonder how it can be possible for me to have too much of dear E.'s society, but strange as that may seem, it can; and worse than that, I dislike Sir Lionel getting too much of it. I don't think it is good for him; and he 's had enough of the commodity since we 've been in Tintagel to produce, according to my point of view and yours, disastrous effects. I decided that drastic measures were necessary for both our sakes, and with me to decide is to act — when anything really important is at stake.

First I persuaded the Tyndals that it would be kindly

to invite Miss Lethbridge to travel in their motor to Bideford, whither they also are bound. I said that Sir Lionel feared we would be rather a crowd for his car, as the roads are supposed to be bad. This flattered them, for their motor, which is somewhat more powerful than ours, is the one object for which they live at present. Besides, they were delighted at the chance of getting the girl to themselves, as they think they met her years ago in Italy, where it is alleged she has never been. Some school girl escapade, perhaps. You had better do a little catechising, later on. Meanwhile, the Tyndals yearn for the opportunity of pumping. Sir Lionel has quite fiercely prevented them from doing so, up to date. He looked ready to challenge poor George to a duel the other evening for merely suggesting that they might have met Miss Lethbridge in Venice.

To Sir L. I hinted that Ellaline was bored, now that you were gone, and that she would enjoy the change of travelling for a day with new people; that she had taken a fancy to the Tyndal boy; and I added that she had asked me privately whether I thought that Sir Lionel would object to her accepting, provided the Tyndals wanted her to go to Bideford. Naturally, when the invitation came, he did *not* object. You 'd have laughed if you could have seen her face when he smiled with apparent benevolent delight upon the suggestion. The sight would have repaid you for many a snub, my poor love-sick swain!

That was where matters stood till your telegram came, a few minutes ago. All I hoped for was, to get rid of the dear child for one long, happy day, and to estrange

her a little (partly for your sake) from her solicitous guardian. But your wire set another bee humming in my motor-bonnet. I determined to do you a good turn if I could; so I flew up, before answering you, to have a talk with the Tyndals. They were starting a few minutes after us, by my advice, and had n't come downstairs yet. Ellaline, too, was still in her room, sulking, no doubt, and had n't said good-bye to Sir Lionel or any of us. I know that, because my room at this hotel has been close to hers — and to his, too; so whenever a word is murmured on a doorstep I hear. No word has been murmured this morning; and E. has had her breakfast sent into her bedroom.

To the Tyndals I said that word had arrived from you, and that in confidence I would tell them that you and Miss Lethbridge are as good as engaged. At least, that you had a private understanding which would be an engagement if Sir Lionel were n't a dog in the manger. He did n't want the girl himself, I explained, yet he did n't want to give her to anyone else — short of a millionaire. You, I went on to say, had wired that you would be back this evening, and Ellaline was dying to stay and see you. Sir Lionel did n't know you were coming, I confessed, and would be angry if he did; but if they — the Tyndals — could somehow misunderstand the arrangements made overnight, and in the confusion of their minds leave Miss Lethbridge behind, it would be a great favour to everyone concerned — except Sir Lionel.

The Tyndals, who think a lot of themselves because they have more money than brains, are annoyed with Sir L. because he snapped at them about Venice; so they

were rather pleased at the idea of doing him a bad turn and at the same time advancing Love's Young Dream. When I assured them it would be easy to say that they understood Ellaline had changed her mind and was going with Sir Lionel, they agreed to slip off without her about half an hour after the flight of Apollo. That is the plan, as it stands, up to date. Sir Lionel and Mrs. Norton won't know till this evening at Bideford that E. is n't with the Tyndals; and then of course I shall get George and Sallie out of his bad graces as well as I can. Meanwhile you will find her at Tintagel, and can bring her on by rail. That will be delightful for you; and as Sir Lionel is old-fashioned in some of his notions, he may be more inclined to consent to an engagement between you after the sort of journey you and she will have together. So I think all interests will have been served.

I am writing in the big hall of the hotel, and Sir Lionel is walking up and down, glaring first out of one window, and then out of another, at the rain, which is beginning to come down in drops as large as half-crowns. I only wish *my* half crowns, or even my shillings, were as plentiful! But perhaps they will be, some day before long — who knows? I do hope Ellaline won't take it into her head to appear at the last minute before we get off, and complicate things. Not that I won't be equal to disposing of her if she does! But no! here is Young Nick, very meek and soapy. He has got his petrol. Emily Norton reluctantly puts down a twenty-year-old volume of Blackwood which she has found in the hotel library. We are off. Good-bye — and good luck.

GWEN.

XXIII

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Tintagel, August 13th

Dearest Lodestar: I can feel you drawing me across miles of land and sea, and if only I could travel on a telepathic pass I would start this minute, Ellaline or no Ellaline. Toward her and Sir Lionel I feel as Mercutio felt toward the Montagus and Capulets: "A plague on both your houses!" Nobody seems to care what becomes of me. Why should I care what becomes of them?

Everything is too horrid and too extraordinary to-day. I got into the wrong side of bed last night, and got out again on the wrong side this morning. It happened to be the only side there was, as the bed stands against the wall in an alcove, where it can't be pulled out; and nobody could expect me to bound like a kangaroo over the foot, could they? But there are times in life when every side of everything is wrong; and this is one of those times with me — has been since dinner last night, when Sir Lionel grinned with joy at the prospect of shunting me upon the Tyndal family for a day. (When you are friends with people they smile; when you are out with them, they grin.)

Well, this morning I thought I would n't hurry to get

down. I felt, if Mrs. Senter beamed at me from under her becoming motor-hat at starting, I should do her a mischief, and if Emily smirked inoffensively I should throw Murray in her face. As for Sir Lionel — words fail to express what I believed myself capable of doing to him. I could have stolen his car, in which he appeared to grudge me a seat, and have gone off with it into space to be a motor pirate. Whence can I have inherited these vicious tendencies? Truly, I never supposed I had them before; but you don't know yourself until people have practically accused you of taking up too much room in their old automobiles, although you 're perfectly aware that you are less than eighteen inches wide at your broadest part in your thickest frock, and you thought they liked your society and kept your gloves. In that mood I would n't have condescended to see Apollo off if he 'd been twice a god, armed with an invitation for me from Juno to a house-party on Olympus.

No sooner, however, did I hear his dear familiar purr as he swept away from the door of the hotel (my balcony is a corner one, and I could just catch the well-known c-r-r-r) when I regretted intensely that I had n't been *en evidence*, looking indifferent. Suddenly, I suffered pangs of apprehension lest my stopping in my room had seemed like (what it really was) a fit of the sulks; but it was past repentance-time. Apollo was gone, Mrs. Senter doubtless sitting by Sir Lionel's side as usual, and probably commenting wittily on my silly conduct.

The Tyndals told me last night that they meant to

start at ten, so I went downstairs five minutes before, too late to have to wait about, too early to be called. I expected to find them in the hall, and when they were n't there, I strolled out to see if the motor had come to the door, thinking they might be watching the loading up of their luggage. As for mine, Apollo had taken it as usual, except a pretty little fitted handbag, small and wonderfully convenient, which Sir Lionel came across in a shop and bought for me (I mean for Ellaline) at Torquay. But there was n't a Tyndal in sight, and not so much as the smell of a motor-car, so I wandered inside and asked the handsome landlady, whom I met near King Arthur's Round Table, whether she had seen the Tyndal automobile or its owners.

"Why," said she, "they went off about ten minutes ago."

"Went off — where?" I asked blankly.

"To Bideford, I think they were going," she replied.

"That can 't be, for I was to have gone with them," said I.

"Indeed?" exclaimed the landlady, polite but puzzled. "I did n't know. I thought you had gone with your own party. I was surprised to meet you here just now. I 'm afraid there must have been some misunderstanding, for certainly Mr. and Mrs. Tyndal and their young cousin have really gone, because they bade me good-bye here in the hall, and said they hoped to come back some day."

She looked at me pityingly, and I felt exactly like Robinson Crusoe before he knew there was going to be a Friday; but, like him, I kept a stiff upper lip. I am

happy to say I even laughed. "Well, that 's very funny," said I, as if being pigeon-holed by Sir Lionel and marooned by the Tyndals was the most amusing experience in the world, and I simply delighted in it. "Of course, somebody or other will count noses and miss me after a while. Then they 'll have to come back and fetch me, I suppose."

"You could go on to Bideford by rail, if you liked," the landlady informed me gratuitously. "There is a train early this afternoon, and ——"

"Oh, I think I 'd better wait here," I said. "If they came back and found me gone, it would be too complicated."

She agreed; but she little guessed how much more complicated it would be to take a train for anywhere without any pennies. If I had money, I would go to *you*, and not to Bideford. At least, that is the way I feel now; but I suppose I would n't, for my obligations to Ellaline have n't snapped with the strain of the situation, although just at this moment they don't seem to matter. It 's only deep down in my heart that I know they do matter.

There is my scrape, dearest of women, and mamma whom I would select if I were able to choose among all eligible mothers since Eve, up to date. The situation has n't changed in the least, to the time of writing, except that it has lasted longer, and got frayed round the edges.

I was paid for, including food and lodging, until after breakfast. It is now half-past five o'clock P.M., pouring with rain, howling with wind, and not only has nobody

come back to collect me, but nobody has telephoned or telegraphed. I have eaten, or pretended to eat, a luncheon, for which I have no money to pay. I refused tea, but was so kindly urged that I had to reconsider; and the buttered toast of servitude is at this moment sticking in my throat, lodged on the sharp edge of an unuttered sob. Your poor, forlorn little daughter! What is to become of her? Will she have to go to the place of unclaimed parcels? Or will she be sold as bankrupt stock? Or will she become a kitchen-maid or "tweeny" in King Arthur's Castle? But don't worry, darling. I won't be such a beast as to post this letter till something is settled, somehow, even if I have to rob the hotel till.

There is nothing to do except write, for I can't compose my mind to read; so I will continue recording my emotions, as French criminals do when condemned to death, or lovesick ladies when they have swallowed slow poison.

5.50.—Rain worse. Wind yelling imprecations. I sit in the hall, as I can't call my room my own. New people are arriving. They look Cook-ey, but are probably Countesses. I gaze at them haughtily, and try to appear prosperous. I hope they think my mother, the Duchess, is taking a nap in our magnificent suite upstairs, while I write a letter to my godfather, the Prince, to thank him for his birthday gift of a rope of pearls which reaches to my knees.

6.15.—The landlady has just been sympathizing with me. She says there is a night train to Bideford. I have poured cold water upon the night train to Bide-

ford, and came near pouring some hot tears on the time-table she kindly brought me.

6.25.—People are going up to dress for dinner. They are God's creatures, but I do not love them.

6.40.—The head-waiter has just fluttered up to ask if I would like a smaller table for dinner. No table would be too small for my appetite. I said ——

7.10.—Darling, Sir Lionel has come back for me, alone, dripping wet, and it was all a mistake, and he did want me, and he 's furious with everybody in the world except me, to whom he is perfectly adorable. And I 'm afraid I adore him. And we 're starting at once, when we 've had a sandwich and coffee — can 't wait for dinner. Everything is *too* nice. I 'll explain as soon as I 've time to write.

Your Radiant Transformation Scene,

A. B.

XXIV

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

The Luttrell Arms, Dunster
Aug. 18th

Duck of the Universe: Five days since I wrote, and it seems five minutes. But I did telegraph — with my last shilling; and even that would be rightfully Ellaline's, if the labourer were n't worthy of his hire.

You see, after the letter I had from her in Torquay, when she wanted money to go to Scotland with her new friends, the McNamaras, I very reluctantly screwed my courage to the asking point, and got more out of Sir Lionel. If he were n't the most generous man in the world he would have privately dubbed me "Oliver Twist" by this time. Perhaps he has! But I trust not. Anyhow, I shall get on without more requests, I hope, until the next "allowance" day comes round; or until every pin is lost and every hairpin has dropped out.

Because in the telegram I was forced to be economical, and ran only to "All well. Love" ("much" scratched out as an extravagance), I must now go back to the moment of Sir Lionel's unexpected, almost miraculous, appearance at Tintagel.

There I was in the hall, scribbling dolefully about my symptoms. "Teuf, teuf, teuf!" heard outside,

between screeches of wind. In bounces Sir Lionel, wet as a merman, dripping rivulets at every step, splashing, swashing in his boots, drops dripping from his eyelashes; glares around, looking ready to bite someone's head off without salt or sauce; sees me; brightens with a watery gleam; comes toward me, rather shy and stiff, yet evidently under the influence of — emotion of some sort. I did n't know whether to expect a scolding or a blessing, so waited speechless.

"What a brute you must think me," was his first remark. I drank it as a thirsty traveller lost on the Sahara would bolt a pint of dew.

"I did n't know what to think," I replied conservatively. "But you are wet, are n't you?"

"Am I?" he asked, mildly surprised. "I had n't noticed. I suppose I am. It 's raining."

"I should think it was," said I. And then we both laughed. It is the nicest thing, to laugh with Sir Lionel! Whatever he might have done against me, I forgave him all instantly.

"Never mind whether I 'm wet or dry," he went on. "Whichever I am, it won't hurt me. The only thing that has hurt was thinking of you being here -- abandoned. By Jove! — I 've been in a murderous mood!"

"A good thing you were n't back in Bengal," said I, mildly.

He looked at me with a sharp look. "Who has been telling you tales about me in Bengal?"

"I sometimes read newspapers," I explained.

"Schoolgirls have no business with newspapers. But hang Bengal! I want to come to an understanding

with you. Is it true or is it not that you wanted to go with the Tyndals in their motor to-day?"

"I wanted to, if you wanted me to."

"I did n't. I hated the idea. But, of course, if you ——"

"*I* did n't. I hated the idea. But I thought your motor was too full for such hilly country."

(Dearest, I longed to tell him who had said that *he* had said, etc., etc.; but I 'd promised; and one must keep one's promises even to Cats.)

"My dear child," Sir Lionel burst out, "little girls should n't do too much independent thinking. It 's bad for their health and their guardians' tempers. If my motor had been too full for hilly country, you would n't have been the Jonah to cast into the sea. Nick would have been fed to the whales. But the idea was ridiculous — ridiculous!"

I was so happy, I did n't even want to defend myself. I understood most of the mystery now. I suppose it 's a compliment to a girl if a woman of the world wants to get rid of her. Anyhow, I consoled myself for hours of misery by laying that flattering unction to my soul.

If I had liked, I could have unravelled the whole tangle for Sir Lionel's still puzzled mind; but if I had done so, I should have been returning cat-claw for cat-claw; so I pretended to be "lost in it, my lord"; and, indeed, it was true that I could n't understand why the Tyndals had failed me.

Sir Lionel explained that, just before reaching Bideford the silencer worked loose, and so got upon Mrs. Norton's nerves that Apollo was stopped in the pouring

rain for Young Nick to right the wrong. As if to prove the truth of the proverb, "the more haste the less speed," in his hurry poor Buddha burnt his hand. While he was wringing it like a distracted goblin, along came the Tyndal car, which had left Tintagel about half an hour after Apollo. To Sir Lionel's amazement, no me! Questions on his part; according to him, idiotic answers on the part of the Tyndals. *He* had thought, of course, I was going with them. *They* had thought that I 'd changed my mind, and gone earlier with him. Everybody confused, apologetic, repeating the same silly excuses over and over, three or four times. Nobody showing the slightest sign of having a remnant of commonsense.

"By Jove! I could have cheerfully executed the lot of them — all but the boy, who seemed to have some glimmerings of sanity," grumbled Sir Lionel. "He had wanted to run up and knock at your door, to make sure you really had gone; but somebody — he began to say who, when Mrs. Tyndal stepped on his foot — forbade him to do it."

I think I can guess who the somebody was, can't you? Though I don't see what arguments she can have used to persuade the really good-natured Tyndals to abandon me.

The rest of the story is, that when Sir Lionel found I had been left behind, he said he would at once turn back and fetch me. Judging from one or two things he let slip inadvertently, I fancy he wanted Emily to come with him, but she drew the line at chaperoning in wet weather, and missing her tea. She proposed tele-

graphing for me to come on by rail. Sir Lionel would n't hear of my making such a journey unaccompanied — me, a simple little French schoolgirl who had never travelled alone in her life! Then Mrs. Senter, kind creature, volunteered to be his companion, if he must return; but Sir Lionel firmly refused the unselfish offer, saying he would n't for the world put her to so much unnecessary trouble. Nick he would have brought, but the unfortunate brown image was suffering so much pain from his burnt hand, that the only humane thing to do was to drive him to a doctor's — which was exactly what Sir Lionel did. Rooms were already engaged at the Royal Hotel; he dumped out Emily, Mrs. Norton, and the luggage there; left Young Nick having his hand treated; and without so much as crossing the threshold of the hotel, turned Apollo's bright bonnet toward Tintagel and me. Rain was coming down in floods. He said nothing about that, but I knew. The storm drew down twilight like the lid of a box; the road was deep in mud; everything that could happen to delay the car did happen; once Sir Lionel had to mend a tyre himself, and almost wished he had n't made Young Nick disgorge the stolen tool; he ought to have arrived at Tintagel an hour before he did; but here he was at last. And would I have a sandwich, and then start, or would I prefer to wait for dinner?

I snatched at the sandwich idea, and his eye brightened. He said he only *looked* wet, for everything was waterproof, and he was "right as rain" — which sounded too appropriate to be comfortable

We ate as the Israelites of old in Passover days, figura-

tively with our staves in our hands; at least, I had a bag in mine, and Sir Lionel a road book, because he 'd lost his way once in his haste, and did n't want to make further mistakes.

By the time we were ready to start, it was as if Merlin had woven an enchantment of invisibility, not only over the castle ruins, but over the whole landscape, which was blotted out behind a white avalanche of rain. The wind howled, mingling with the boom of the sea; and altogether it was such a bewitched, Walpurgis world that I tingled with excitement.

Sir Lionel wanted to put me inside the car, but I pleaded that I had been so lonely and sad all day, I must be close to someone now. This plea instantly broke down his determination, which had been very square-chinned and firm till I happened to think of that argument.

He knew my coat to be waterproof, because he chose it himself in London, and I tied on a perfectly sweet rain-hood, which I 'd never needed before, because this was the only real storm we 'd had. It is a crimson hood, and I knew I was nice in it, from the look of Sir Lionel's eyes.

This was my first night run in the car, and the first time since starting on the tour that I 'd sat on the front seat by his side. Early as it was, it "made night," and Sir Lionel lit the great lamps. Instantly it was as if a curtain of darkness unrolled on either side, leaving only the road clear and pale, spouting mud, and the rain in front like a silver veil floating across black velvet. I sat close to Sir Lionel. I can't tell you how good the

sense of his nearness and protection was, and how glad I felt to know that he had n't really wanted to send me away from him. I would have given up anything — no, *everything* else in the world just then, for the sake of that knowledge — except, of course, your dear love. We didn't talk much, but he is one of those men to whom you don't need to talk. The silence was like that unerring kind of speech when you can't say the wrong thing if you try; and if Sir Lionel had said in the wind and darkness: "I have got to drive the car into the sea, and you and I must die together in five minutes," I should have answered: "Very well. With you I 'm not afraid." And it would have been true.

The hills looked stupendous before we quite came to them; great bunchy black humps of night; but they seemed to kneel like docile elephants as we drew near, to let Apollo mount upon their backs. We passed lovely old cottages, which in the strange white light of our Bleriots looked flat, as stage scenery, against that wide-stretched "back-cloth" of inky velvet. It was like motoring in a dream — one of those dreams born before you 've quite dropped asleep, while your eyes are still open. We tore through Boscastle, and on to Bude, along an empty road, with the trees flying by like torn black flags, and the rain giving a glimpse now and then of tall cliffs, as its veil blew aside. I was never so happy in my life, and when I just could n't help saying so to Sir Lionel, what do you suppose he answered? "That 's exactly what I was thinking." And then he added: "Good girl! Grand little sportswoman! I 'm proud of you!"

Presently, once in a while the dazzling radiance of our lamps would die down and threaten to fail. At last it did fail altogether, and we were blotted out in the night, as if we had suddenly ceased to exist. "Carbide all used up," explained Sir Lionel. By this time we were near Hartland Point (the promontory of Hercules for the ancients) and Sir Lionel said that the best thing to do was to crawl on slowly until we should come to Clovelly. There we could leave the car at the top of the hill, go down to the village, rouse someone at a hotel, get hot coffee, and wait until dawn, when the lamps would no longer be needed.

We could distinguish nothing in the night, except a glimmer of road between dark banks, until suddenly, looking far down toward the moaning sea, we caught sight of a few lights like yellow stars which seemed to have been tossed over a precipice, and to have caught on a steep hillside, as they rolled. "That 's Clovelly," said Sir Lionel. He stopped the car on a kind of natural plateau and lifted me lightly down, so that I should n't splash into unseen abysses of mud. Apollo would be safe there, he said, though in old days the folk of Clovelly used to be not only desperate smugglers, but wreckers, and would entice ships upon the rocks by means of lure-lights. They were very different now, and as honest and kind-hearted as any people in the world.

There was no dawn yet, but the wind had dropped a little, and the long crystal spears of rain seemed to bring with them an evanescent, ethereal glitter, reflected from unseen stars above the clouds. The trembling silver haze dimly showed us how to pick our way down

a steep, narrow street of steps, over which fountains of water played and swirled. There were lights of boats in a little harbour, far, far below, and the extraordinary village of tiny white houses appeared to have tumbled down hill, like a broken string of pearls fallen from a goddess's neck.

Sir Lionel held my arm to keep me from tripping, and we descended the steps slowly, the rain that sprayed against our faces smelling salt as the sea, its briny "tang" mingling with the fragrance of honeysuckle and fuchsias. The combination, distilled by the night, was intoxicating; and if I ever smell it again, even at the other end of the world, my thoughts will run back to Sir Lionel and the fairy village of Clovelly.

Half-way down the cleft in the cliff, which is Clovelly's one street, we stopped at a house where a faint light burned sleepily. It was the New Inn, and when Sir Lionel knocked loudly, I was doubtful as to the reception we were likely to have at such an hour. But I need n't have worried — in Devon! Even if you wake people out of pleasant dreams to disagreeable realities, and demand coffee, and trail wet marks over their clean floors, they are kind and friendly. A delightful man let us in, and instead of scolding, pitied us — a great deal more than I, at any rate, needed to be pitied. He lit lights, and we saw a quaint room, whose shadows threw out unexpected gleams of polished brass, and blues and pinks of old china.

Though the calendar said August 13th, the temperature talked it down, and insisted on November, so an invitation into a clean, warm kitchen was acceptable.

The nice man poked up the dying fire, put on wood and coals, and soon got a kettle of water to boiling. We should have some good hot coffee, he cheerily promised, before we could say "Jack Robinson." But when it leaked out that we had had no dinner except a sandwich at Tintagel, and nothing since, his warm Devonshire heart yearned over us; and to the hot coffee he added eggs and bacon.

While the dear things fizzled and bubbled, we were allowed to sit by the stove and toast our feet; and if anything could have smelled more heavenly than the salt rain and sweet honeysuckle out of doors, it would have been the eggs and bacon in the New Inn kitchen.

We begged to eat in the kitchen, too, and even that was permitted us, at a table spread with a clean cloth which must have been put away in a lavender cupboard. By the time the coffee, with foaming hot milk, and the sizzling eggs and bacon were ready, the early daylight was blue on the window panes. The rain had stopped with the first hint of sunrise, and in Clovelly at least (Clovelly means "shut in valley," a name not worthy of its elfin charm) the wind had gone to sleep.

I don't know how much Sir Lionel suggested paying for that breakfast, but it must have been something out of the way, for our Devonshire benefactor protested that it was far too much. He would accept the regular price, and no more. Why, we had only got him up an hour before his usual time. That was nothing. It would do him good; and he would have no extra pay.

Warm, comfortable, and refreshed, Sir Lionel and I bade our host good-bye, meaning to continue our

journey to Bideford; but what we saw outside was too beautiful to turn our backs upon in that unappreciative, summary fashion. It was not sunrise yet, but was just going to be sunrise, and the world seemed to be waiting for it, hushed and expectant.

The white village glimmered in the pearly light, like a waterfall arrested in its rush down a cleft in a hill. Not having seen Clovelly, you may think that a far-fetched simile; but really it is n't. If a young cataract could be turned into a village, that would be Clovelly. The marvellous little place is absolutely unique; yet if one could liken it to anything else on earth, it might be to a corner of Mont St. Michel, or a bit of old Bellagio, going down to the sea; and certainly it is more Italian than English in atmosphere and colouring, only it is perfectly clean, as clean as a toy, or a Dutch village; so *that* part of the "atmosphere" is n't entirely Italian! I even saw waste-paper pots; and if that is n't like Broek in Waterland, what is? Down in the harbour, the fishing boats lay like a flock of resting birds; and as we descended the cobbled steps of the street, to go to the shore, the early morning donkeys began to come up, laden with heavy bags and panniers, just as you and I saw them in Italy, and driven by just such boys and old men as I remember there, dark-eyed, picturesque, one or two with red caps. The doors of the little low-browed houses huddled on either side opened here and there, up and down the path, giving glimpses of pretty, neat interiors; bits of old furniture, the glint of a copper kettle, a brass jug, or a bit of mended blue china. A gossipy Devonshire cat came out and begged for caresses,

mewing the news of the night — such a chatty creature! — and down on the beach, we made friends with the oldest man of the village, born in 1816. He was a handsome old fellow, with pathetic, faded eyes in a tanned, ruddy face; and the queer little harbour (everything is little at Clovelly, except the inhabitants) with its rustic sort of pier, and red-sailed fishing boats, looked as if it had been designed entirely as a background for him. However, it 's much more antique even than he — six hundred years old, instead of something short of a hundred, and made by the famous Carey family. We stopped there talking to the ancient sailor-man, hearing how the Clovelly fishermen go out with black nets by day in good weather, and at night with white ones, to "attract the fish." "That is trew, Miss," said he, when I laughed, thinking it a joke. I love the Devonshire way of saying "true," and other words that rhyme. Their soft voices are as gentle, as kindly, as the murmur of their own blue sea.

As we mounted the ladder-like path to the top of Clovelly, to go back to Apollo again, the sun came up out of the sea, where the blue line of water marked the edge of the world, and spilt floods of gold over it, like a tilted christening cup. We turned and stood still to watch the day born of dawn; and I feel sure that if we had come to Clovelly to spend several weeks, I could never have learned to know the place as I had divined it, in this adventure. You seem to learn more about a flower by inhaling its perfume after rain, don't you think, than by dissecting it, petal by petal? I fancy there is something like that in getting the feeling and

impression of places at their best, by sudden revelations. Of course, I want to go back to Clovelly, but not with any of the Mrs. Nortons of the world. I could n't bear to do that, after being alone there with Sir Lionel. While one's heart is thrilled by exquisite sights, and the ineffable thoughts born of them, one knows poor Emily is wondering whether the servants are looking after things properly at home; and that very knowledge is apt to slam down an iron shutter in one's soul.

It must have been about five o'clock when we took our places in the car again. We had only eleven miles' run to Bideford, and I wished them twice eleven, for surely they are among the most beautiful miles in England. No wonder people believe in fairies in this part of the world! It would be ungrateful if they did n't. As the sun climbed, the brown wood roads were inlaid with gold in wavy patterns. From our heights, now and again we caught glimpses of Clovelly, down its deep ravines. The Hobby Drive, which belongs to Clovelly Court, is almost more exquisite than Buckland Chase, on the way to Dartmoor; if you had been there with me, you would know I could n't give it higher praise. And how I wish you *had* been! How I wish you could see these English woods! They have such an air of dainty gaiety, very different from Austrian or German or French forests; and though their elms and oaks and beeches are often giants, they seem dedicated to the spirit of youth. Their shadows are never black, but only a darker green, or translucent gray; and part of their charm is a nymph-like frivolousness which comes, I think, from their ruffly green *dessous*. Other woods

have no *dessous*. Their ankles are mournfully bare, and their stockings dark.

In the woods of the Hobby Drive, the bracken was like elfin plumes; each stone, wrapped in moss, was a lump of silver coated with verdigris; distant cliffs seen between the trees were cut out of gray-green jade, against a sea of changing opal; and in the high minstrel-galleries of the latticed beeches a concert of birds was fluting.

Is n't Gallantry Bower a fine name? At first thought it would appear an inappropriate one, for it 's a sheer cliff overlooking the sea on one side and a vast sweep of woodland on the other; but I can make it seem appropriate, by picturing some wild brave sailor making love to his sweetheart there, and telling her about the sea, her only rival in his love. No doubt it 's a corruption of some old Cornish name, and I refuse to accept it as a Lover's Leap, though such a legend has grown up around it. I 'm tired of Lover's Leaps.

The whole coast, as we swept round, was a vast golden sickle in the early morning light; and everything was so beautiful that the door of my heart swung wide open. No arm would have been strong enough to push it shut, not even Mrs. Senter's. Instead of feeling angry with her, as we drew near Bideford, I was grateful for the adventure she had (indirectly) given me.

The servants of the Royal Hotel were just waking up, but, of course, being Devonshire people, instead of being cross they were delightfully good-natured and smiling. I was shown to a pleasant room, and provided with a hot bath which (with nearly a whole bottle of

eau de Cologne extravagantly emptied into it) made me feel as if I had had a refreshing eight hours' sleep. Already it seemed as if the night's experience had been a dream, dreamed in that sleep. But I was glad, glad it was real, and not a dream; something I had lived through, by Sir Lionel's side; a clear memory to remain like a happy island in the sea of life whatever the future weather.

I dressed slowly, not wanting even "forty winks"; and about eight o'clock Emily knocked at my door. She had been worried, she said, and not able to sleep, fearing accidents, waking now and then, to listen for the sound of a car. Poor dear, she would n't know Apollo's noble voice from the threepenny thrum of a motor bicycle! But she was kind and solicitous, though I think a little shocked to find my vitality in such a state of effervescence. She would have approved of me if I had been a draggled wreck; but even as it was, she felt it worth while to explain why she had n't accompanied her brother. She would have proposed doing so, she assured me, but her neuralgia had been very trying yesterday, owing to the bad weather and east wind. She feared to be more trouble than assistance to Sir Lionel, and as he was my guardian, I was sufficiently chaperoned by him; any expert in etiquette would confirm her in that opinion, she anxiously added. Nevertheless, when I told her about our stop at Clovelly, she shook her head, and intimated that perhaps it had better not be referred to in public. I suppose by "in public," she meant before the Tyndals and Mrs. Senter.

At nine I had the pleasure of meeting the fair Gwendolen again, in one of the most remarkakle rooms you can imagine. Sir Lionel had engaged it in advance, to be our private sitting-room, but it is as celebrated as it is interesting. Only think, Charles Kingsley wrote "Westward Ho!" in it, and it is such a quaint and beautiful room, it must have given him inspiration. You see, the hotel used to be the house of a merchant prince who was a great importer of tobacco in Queen Elizabeth's days; so it is n't strange that it should have many fine rooms; but the one where Kingsley wrote is the best. It 's sad that the oak panelling should be ruined with paint and varnish; but nothing short of an earthquake could spoil the ceiling, which is the famous feature. The merchant prince hired two Italians to come to England and make the wonderful mouldings by hand. That was long before the days of cement, so the fantastic shapes had to be fastened to each other and the ceiling with copper wire. When the skilled workmen had finished their fruits and flowers and leaves, and all the weird fancies which signified the evolution of Man, the canny merchant prince promptly packed the Italians back again to their native land, lest other merchant princes should employ them to repeat the marvellous ceiling for their houses! By this thoughtful act, he secured for himself the one and only specimen of the kind; and to this day nobody has ever been able to copy it, though the attempt has often been made. The marvellous part is the startlingly high relief of the mouldings, and the quaintness of the evolutionary ideas, all those centuries before Darwin.

It was rather disappointing to find out that the beautiful ceiling had nothing to do with Charles Kingsley's wish to use the room as a study. It was in the time of the present landlord's grandfather, who owned a quantity of rare old books, records of Bideford's past, and Mr. Kingsley wanted to refer to them. But their owner valued them too much to lend, even to such a man as Charles Kingsley. "You must come and write in the room," said he. So Kingsley came and wrote in the room, and liked it and the books so much that he gave a glowing account of both to Froude, who presently arrived and used the remarkable room for *his* study, too.

The books are there still, carefully put away; and a portrait of the good Mayor of Westward Ho! (the novel, not its namesake town) which was found in the cellar with Vandyck's name faintly traced on it, hangs opposite the fireplace. The great treasure of the room, though, after the ceiling, is a letter from Kingsley, framed, protected with glass, and lying on a table.

Mrs. Senter looked almost green, when she beheld me, the picture of health and joy, and saw on what good terms I was with Sir Lionel. I am certain, dear, that she wants to marry him, and I can't think she 's capable of appreciating such a man, so it must be for his money. A "sportin', huntin', don't-you-know — what?" sort of fellow would please her better, if all else were suitable, because she could turn him round her finger; and that neither she nor anybody else can ever do with Sir Lionel — though he is pathetically chivalrous where women are concerned, and still more pathetically credulous.

I remember so well your reading "Westward Ho!"

aloud to me when I was about ten, and had been ill. I associate it with the joy of getting well. It made me feel proud of my Devonshire ancestors, even then, and it makes me more proud now, for I 've been reading the book for the second time, in Kingsley-land. It 's like the Bible almost, in Bideford. I should pity the person who dared pick a flaw in the story, in the hearing of a Bideford man, woman, or child. Why, I believe even a Bideford dog would understand the insult, and snap!

It 's a great, and rather original compliment to name a town in honour of a book; but "Westward Ho!" the novel, is worthy of a finer namesake. Of course, Rudyard Kipling having been to school in Westward Ho! makes the place more interesting than it ever could have been of itself, in spite of its glorious neighbour, the sea. But Bideford is a delightful place. Dad used to say that no men in the world could beat the men of Devon for courage; and that Bideford men were amongst the bravest of all, as you and I would have known from "Westward Ho!" even if we 'd never read history. It looks an old-world town, almost unspoiled, even now, with its far-famed bridge on twenty-four arches, its steeply sloping streets, its quay, and its quaint pink and green houses by the river. In the Old Ship Tavern "The Brotherhood of the Rose" was founded (you remember), and Sir Richard Grenville — dear Sir Richard!— had his house where the Castle Inn stands now. I took a long walk with Sir Lionel and (I am sorry to say) Mrs. Senter, on the Quay along the riverside; and there are some guns there, which they say were lost from the Spanish Armada.

While we were walking, who should join us but Dick Burden, back from Scotland! It appears that he arrived at Tintagel last night, only a little while after Sir Lionel and I had left in the car. He expected to be earlier, but he took cross-country trains which looked promising on time-tables, and missed connection. I can't be thankful enough he did n't arrive before we started, instead of after, for, of course, Sir Lionel would have had to ask him to come with us, and that would have spoiled everything. There would have been no beautiful "memory island" in my sea! Do you know, I had almost forgotten Dick for two or three days? He seemed to have gone out of my life, as if he had never been in, and it was quite a mental shock to meet him on the quay at Bideford. He did n't seem to be in the picture at all, whereas Sir Lionel is always in it, whatever or whenever it may be.

We (Sir Lionel and I) asked politely for his mother's health, and he answered, apparently without thinking, "Mother? — oh, she 's all right." Then he evidently remembered that he 'd been sent for because she was ill, and had the grace to look ashamed of his hard-heartedness. He explained that when he arrived, he found her already better, though nervous, and that she was "practically cured." But I saw him and his aunt exchange a look. I wonder if it meant that the mother has any weird sort of disease — contagious, perhaps? I do hope it is n't anything I have n't had. It would be so awkward to come down with it now; though the sight of Dick with mumps, for instance, would repay me for a good deal.

Mrs. Senter's room at Bideford adjoined mine, with a (locked) door between; and that night, for half an hour after I 'd gone to bed I heard a murmur of voices, hers and Dick's. They seemed to be tremendously in earnest about something. Luckily, I could n't hear a word they said; otherwise I should have had the bother of stopping my ears; but I could n't help knowing that there was a heated argument, Aunt Gwen protesting, Nephew Dick insisting; and, after stress and storm, a final understanding arrived at which apparently satisfied both.

Such a splendid road it was, going out of Bideford, with views of sea and river, the distant shore levels indigo, and a fiery golden light, like spilt sherry, on the livid green of the salt-paled grass. The sails of fishing boats from Instow rose from dark, ruffled waters, white as lily petals; and out of heavy purple clouds, poured streams of flaming light, as if bags loaded with gold dust had burst with their own weight. Long sand flats gleamed red as coral with some low-growing sea plant; and the backs of wind-blown leaves on bush and hedge were all dull silver, under the shadows of racing clouds, that tore at thousand horse-power speed over golden meadows. It was an extraordinary, but thoroughly English effect; and is n't it sad, the grazing cows and sheep we passed never once looked up or cared!

But the people — the charming peasants of Devon — cared. They looked up, and smiled at their sky, as if it gave them good thoughts; and everyone on foot or in waggon was so polite to us, flashing such kind looks from beautiful eyes, that we had the sensation of tasting honey. It kept us busy, returning the bows of the

handsome, courteous people, and, altogether, it was like a royal progress. Poor Apollo is n't used to such treatment, out of Devonshire and Cornwall, I can tell you! He always does his best to be considerate, yet he is often misunderstood, being nothing but a motor-car, whom nobody loves! It was a joy to see merry Devonshire children flinging themselves into our dust, as if it were perfumed spray, and playing that they, too, were motor-cars. Such a nice change after some counties where we had behaved beautifully without any appreciation, to feel that for once we gave pleasure to some one, as we passed in and out of their obscure little lives!

The wind was laden with the scent of honeysuckle, and the sweet, yellow hay, which blew out of high-piled carts to twine like gold webbing on flowery hedges and on the crimson hollyhocks that rose like straight, tall flames against whitewashed walls.

Even the droves of sheep we met were more polite than non-Devonshire sheep, for instead of blocking our way obstinately, keeping just in front so that we could pass on neither side, they thoughtfully charged into village inns and cottage gardens. But, of course, you can't expect pink sheep to act like ordinary mutton-hood. These Devonshire creatures look exactly like a lot of pink wool mats blowing away. Probably they are "pixie led," for Devonshire simply swarms with pixies. If you are a human being, and happen to put your stockings on wrong side out, they get power over you at once. But I don't know what the trick is, if you are a sheep.

We ran above a great ravine at Barnstaple, and the scene was so fine, that I gave mental thanks to the glaciers which, in the ice age, had so tastefully scooped out all this down-country into graceful curves and majestic cliffs. After leaving the sea behind us we were ringed in, swallowed up among lovely, gracious hills, which hid the world from us — us from the world. For miles upon miles, a snake-like road writhed smoothly down the sides of these hills, until at last, after a wildly exhilarating run we found ourselves in a peaceful green valley. The Hobby Drive was no more beautiful, and not half so exciting; but by now we were coming to the Switzerland of England. As we sped on, great downs rolled up behind us, and towered above our heads like the crests of huge green waves at breaking point. Even the sky suited itself to the country here, forming bigger, more tumbled clouds than elsewhere; and to my surprise I saw American goldenrod, such as I used to gather as a child, growing, quite at home, among yellow ox-eyed daisies.

There was a tremendous hill, wriggling down with wicked twists to Lynton, and in the middle we met a car that had torn off all its tyres. Sir Lionel asked if we could do anything, but the chauffeur was so disgusted with life that, though he snapped out "No, thank you," his eyes said "Damn!"

At Lynton we stopped at a hotel like an exaggerated, glorified cottage, with a thatched roof and a veranda running all round. It stands in a big, perfumed garden, and from the windows and that quaint stone-paved veranda you can look over the sea to the Welsh coast,

whence, at evening, two blazing eyes of light watch you across the blue water.

Sir Lionel had meant to stay only one night at the Cottage Hotel, but Lynton was beautiful, with a siren beauty, that would not let us go. Even his resolution was n't proof against its witchery. So we stopped two whole days, going "downstairs" (as I called it) to Lynmouth, to see the old Shelley Cottage and lots of other things. But oh, what a road from Lynton! If a young fly, when its mother takes it for its first walk down a wall, feels as I did, crawling to Lynmouth, both brakes on, I pity it. I was n't exactly frightened, for I never could be, quite, with Sir Lionel driving, but I was prickly with awe. It was a good thing Emily did n't go with us. I believe her poor little pin-cushion heart would have burst in sheer fright, and all the sawdust would have trickled out. I laughed hysterically, when I saw a motor garage at the bottom. It ought to be a motor hospital, for few cars can get down unscathed, I should think. Afterward, when we were safely up again, Sir Lionel said that, if he had known what it was really like he would n't have taken Mrs. Senter and me in the car, but would have had us go in Sir George Newnes's lift. Not that he did n't trust Apollo, but he confessed to being uncomfortable for us. I will say that Mrs. Senter behaved well, however, and never emitted one squeak, though her complexion looked when we arrived at Lynmouth as if she had been on a tossing ship for weeks.

Up at Lynton, the great thing to do, is to walk along the edge of the sea cliff to the Valley of Rocks (a kind

of nature museum for statues and busts of Titans), locked in between Castle Rock and the Devil's Cheesewring. It is a startlingly magnificent walk, but when you are actually in the Valley of Rocks, it is n't quite so wonderful as when seen from a distance; the arena itself is rather like the backyard of the gods, where they threw their broken mead-cups. I had a queer feeling of having been there before, which I could n't understand for a minute, until a scene in "Lorna Doone" flashed back to me. And a young maid in the hotel firmly believes that many of the fantastic shapes of rock were once people who (according to an old story), were turned into stone for behaving irreligiously on Sundays.

Yesterday morning we said good-bye to Lynton, and Sir Lionel, Dick, Mrs. Senter, and I walked to Watersmeet, Emily going along the upper road in the car with Young Nick, whose hand was well enough to drive. I don't know whether Dad ever talked to you about Watersmeet; but I 'm surprised if he did n't, because not only is it one of the very most beautiful beauty spots of Devon, but not far beyond, on the way to Exmoor, is Brendon, our name place.

You can guess without my telling, why Watersmeet is called Watersmeet: and it is the most musical meeting you can imagine; rocks on one side, a wooded hill on the other, and down below, the singing river. We walked along an exquisite low-lying path from Watersmeet, and all about I saw the name of Brendon: Brendon village; Brendon forge, and other Brendons. I was so excited that I forgot the Lethbridge episode, and

was on the point of exclaiming to Sir Lionel "How interesting to come on father's ancestral home!" I wonder what would have happened if I had? I should have had to try and blunder out of the scrape somehow, with Dick's eyes on me, sparkling with mischief, and Mrs. Senter critical.

I forgot to tell you that the Tyndals left us at Bideford, having no excuse to cling, even if they wanted to, because they had "done" Exmoor already; but since the evening when Mrs. Tyndal tried to pump me about Venice, dear Gwendolen has been restless and suspicious. She can't suspect the truth, of course, unless Dick has told her, which I 'm sure he has n't (for his own sake), but she suspects something. She has a common enough mind to spring to some horrid conclusion, such as my having been secretly in Venice with objectionable people. Perhaps she thinks me privately married! I 'm sure she 'd be delighted if that were the truth, because then Dick and Sir Lionel would both be safe.

As we walked, Dick kept trying to get me far enough away from the others to tell me some news, which he hurriedly whispered was important. But even if I 'd wanted to give him a chance, which I did n't, fate would have denied it to him.

At Rockford Inn we took to the motor again, finding Emily limp after what she considered appalling hills; but I 'm sure they were nothing to the Lynton-Lynmouth one, as this time Apollo himself had been sent down in the big lift.

Now we were coming to Doone-land; and I was all eagerness to see it, because of "Lorna Doone," and

because of things I 'd heard from Sir Lionel, as we walked side by side for a few minutes after Watersmeet. I had supposed that if there were any foundation for the Doone story, it was as slight as the "fabric of a dream"; but he told me of a pamphlet he had read, "A Short History of the Original Doones," by a Miss Ida or Audrie Browne, only about eight or nine years ago. She said it was extraordinary how well the author of "Lorna" had known all the traditions of her family — for she was one of the Doones; and that there really was a Sir Ensor, a wild rebellious son of an Earl of Moray, who travelled with his wife to Exmoor, and settled there, in a rage because the king would give him no redress against his elder brother.

"How does she spell her name of Audrie?" I asked, trying to look more good and innocent than Eve could possibly have been even in pre-serpentine days.

"A-u-d-r-i-e," he answered, and I trusted that Dick was too far behind to hear what we were saying. "That was the favourite name for girls in the Doone family," Sir Lionel went on. "Miss Browne thinks Sir Ensor and his wife must have crossed the Quantocks coming here, and have taken a fancy to the name of West Quantoxhead's patron saint, Audrie, also spelled that way."

"It 's rather a pretty name," I ventured, feeling pink.

"One of the prettiest in the world," said Sir Lionel. I was pleased — though I ought to have been bowed down with the burden of borrowed guilt.

There was a bad motor road from Oare to the gateway of the moor, but Apollo did n't mind, though I think he was glad to stop outside Malmsmead Farm, where

we had lunch. I suppose you can't expect such modern creatures as motors and chauffeurs, especially Bengali ones, to appreciate farmhouses seven hundred years old! I loved the place, though, and so did Sir Lionel. Nothing ever tasted better than the rosy ham, the crisp cottage bread, the thick cream, and wild honey the farm people gave us. And the honey smelt like the moor, which has just as individual and haunting a fragrance as Dartmoor, though different.

After lunch I wanted to see the Doone Valley, and the ruins of the Doone houses (which, by the way, my namesake Miss Browne says were not the Doone houses, but only the huts where the brigand-band used to keep stolen cattle), so Sir Lionel said I must have a pony. I was n't tired, though he thought I ought to be, after our walk; but the idea of riding a rough Exmoor pony was great fun, and I did n't object. Sir Lionel asked Mrs. Senter (who had been making fun of the Doone story at lunch) rather coolly if she would care to go, too; and to his evident surprise, though not at all to mine, she instantly said she would.

They have several ponies at the farm, and Sir Lionel hired two, he and Dick meaning to walk, and Emily intending to stop in the farm sitting room nodding over the visitors' book, full of interesting names, no doubt.

No sooner had our dear, roughly fringed little beasts been saddled, and we swung on to their backs, than there arose a great hue and cry in the farmyard. The stag hunt was passing!

Such an excitement you never saw. Nobody would have thought the same thing had happened many times

a year, for generations. The big, good-natured farmer raced about, waving his arms, and adjuring us to "Coom on!" The postman darted by on his bicycle, forgetful of letters, thinking only of the stag; pretty girls from the neighbouring Badgeworthy Farm, and Lorna Doone Farm tore up a hill, laughing and screaming. "They 'm found! They 'm found!" yelled the farm hands. Everybody shouted. Everybody ran, or at least danced up and down; and wilder than all was the joy of our Exmoor ponies, Mrs. Senter's and mine.

They did n't intend to let the hunt go by without them, the stanch little sporting beasts! We had n't the least idea what they meant to do, or perhaps — just perhaps! — we might have stopped them; but before Mrs. Senter and I knew what was happening to us, off we dashed on pony-back after the hunt.

I laughed so much I could hardly keep my seat, but I did somehow, though not very gracefully, and in about five minutes Sir Lionel's long legs had enabled him to catch my little monster, which he grabbed by the reins and stopped, before we 'd got mixed up with the stag-hounds. Dick was slower about rescuing his aunt, because his legs are shorter than Sir Lionel's; and her pony had not the pleasant disposition of mine. Dick vowed afterward that it spit at him.

After reading "Lorna" the Doone Valley looked rather too gentle, with its grassy slopes, to be satisfactory to my brigand-whetted mind; and the ruins of the Doone houses would have been disappointing, too, if it had n't been for Miss Audrie Browne's tale of the distant dwellings, in the Weir Water Valley; but I liked hearing

that all the hills have names of their own, and that you can be sure you are not going to fall into a treacherous bog, if only you see a sprig of purple heather — a good, honest plant, which hates anything secret. Our ponies did n't need the heather signal, though; they shied away from bogs as if by instinct, they knew the moor so well. If we had stumbled into a pitfall, our only hope would have been to lie quite flat, and crawl along the surface with the same motion that you make in swimming.

It was late afternoon by the time we had seen all that the ponies wanted us to see of the Doone Valley, and then our way led us back to Lynmouth, by the appalling Countisbury Hill; on to Parracombe, Blackmore Gate, Challacombe, romantic little Simonsbath (sacred to the memory of Sigmund the dragon-slayer, and two outlaws, of whom Tom Faggus, of the "Strawberry horse," was one), and pretty, historic Exford, and so to Dunster. A beautiful road it was to the eye, but not always to the tyre, and half the hills of England seemed to have lined up in a procession. But Apollo smiled in his bonnet at them all, and appeared rather pleased than otherwise to show what he could do.

When we came into Dunster it was almost dark — just the beautiful hour when the air seems to have turned blue, a deep, clear azure; and of all the quaintly picturesque places we have seen, I know at first glimpse that Dunster would turn out to be the best. Some towns, like some people, introduce themselves to you in a friendly, charming way, with no chill reserve, as if they were sure you deserved to see their best side. It 's

like that with Dunster, anyhow when you arrive in a motor, and the first thing you see is the ancient Yarn Market, wooden, octagonal, perfect. Then before you have recovered from the effect of that, and the general unspoiledness of everything, you come to the stone porch of the Luttrell Arms Inn; old and grim, with openings for crossbows with which I suppose the Abbots of Cleve must have had to defend themselves, because the house once belonged to them.

If you could see no other town but Dunster, it would be worth while coming across seas to England. But I suppose I 've said that about other places, haven 't I? Well, I can 't help it if I have. Dunster is absolutely perfect — not one false note struck in the quaint music of its antiquity.

Our sitting room was the Abbot's refectory, splendid with black oak beams, and a noble ceiling. Its diamond-paned windows look into a wonderful courtyard, where you expect to see monks walking, or perhaps cavaliers; and on the hill above the garden, there are earthworks thrown up by Oliver Cromwell's army during the siege of Dunster Castle — the "Alnwick of the West." To-morrow, we are to be allowed, as a special favour, to see the inside of the Castle which towers up so grandly against the sky. It is n't open to the public; but Sir Lionel knows some relatives of the owners, so we are to be shown round.

"To-morrow," I say. But if I don't stop at once, and go to bed, it will be "to-day."

Ever your

AUDRIE.

XXV

FROM SIR LIONEL PENDRAGON TO COLONEL PATRICK O'HAGAN

Swan Hotel, Wells, Aug. 20th

My Dear Pat: What a good fellow you are! Your letter, just forwarded here, has been like for me a draught from the "cup which cheers but not ——" No, on second thoughts I can't go on with the quotation "but not inebriates." I rather think the cup has inebriated me a little. Anyhow, it has made me a bit conceited. I say to myself, "Well, if this is his opinion of me, why not believe there 's something in it, and do as other men have done before me? He ought to be a judge of men, and know enough of women to have some idea of the sort of person it would be possible for one of them to love." That is the state of mind to which you have brought me, with a little ink and a little paper, and plenty of good intentions. It would take about a magnum of champagne to exhilarate some men as your praise and your advice have exhilarated me.

When I wrote you last, I was in the dumps. It was a dull world, and all the tigers I had ever shot were mounted on sackcloth, or stuffed with ashes. Sounds disgusting, does n't it? But suddenly, the sun broke out, and dulness and tigers fled together. I suppose

I must always have been a creature of moods, and did n't know it; for all it took to change gray Purgatorio to blue Paradiso was a few words from a girl. She said she did n't love Dick, and would as soon marry my chauffeur — or words to that effect. Explained everything — or, if she did n't explain, looked at me, and I thought she had explained. I forget now whether she did explain or not, rationally and satisfactorily, but it does n't matter. There is no one like her, and I have reached a stage of idiocy concerning her which I would blush to describe. I see now that the feeling which a very young man, hardly out of boyhood, dignified with the name of love, is merely a kind of foundation that, when fallen into picturesque ruin, makes a good firm flooring of experience to build second, or real, love, upon. I don't know whether that 's well or badly said, but it expresses my state of mind.

If only this second true love of mine were not the daughter of the first and false!

Even now, when I frankly acknowledge to myself that she can make the light of the world for me, there are black moments when I distrust her — distrust my impressions of her; and hate myself for doing both. I used to believe so firmly in heredity that I can't throw aside my old theories in a moment, even for her sake. How comes Ellaline de Nesville's and Fred Lethbridge's daughter to be what this girl seems? That 's what I ask myself; but there again your letter helps. You remind me that "our parents are not our only ancestors."

But enough of all this rhapsodizing and doubting.

There 's nothing definite to tell you, except that she has said she does n't care for Dick Burden, and that, generally speaking, if appearances are against her, I must kindly not judge by them.

"Give her the benefit of the doubt as long as you can," you say. But, thank heaven I can do more. I give her the benefit of not doubting at all, except in those black moments I have confessed to you.

We have had some good road adventures together, and she has proved herself a thorough sportswoman, as well as a jewel of a companion; but, of course, I have n't had her often to myself. Mrs. Senter and Dick Burden are still of the party, and say nothing about future plans, though there was a vague understanding when they first came that they were asked for a fortnight. They seem to be enjoying themselves, so I suppose I ought to be pleased; and Mrs. Senter is agreeable to everybody, though sometimes it has occurred to me that she and Ellaline don't hit it off invariably. Still, I may be mistaken. She praises Ellaline, and seems anxious to throw her into Dick's society, which presumably she would n't do if she did n't like the girl.

Dick did run up to Scotland to see his mother for a few days, and I thought, as Mrs. Burden sent for him on account of her health, he might have to stay on. But no such luck. He was back almost indecently soon — pounced down upon us at Bideford, just in time, perhaps, to prevent my *taking your advice before I got it.*

The fact is, there was a queer misunderstanding with which I won't bore you, but by which Ellaline was

left behind at Tintagel, and I went back alone to fetch her, with the car. She was adorable, even unusually adorable, and I loved her horribly. Yes, that 's the only word for it, because it hurt; it hurt so much that next day I felt I could n't go on bearing the pain, and that I should have to find a chance to tell her. I was pretty sure she would think me a middle-aged and several other kinds of a fool, even though she were polite in words; nevertheless, I might have run the risk, even unspurred by your letter, if Dick had n't come back looking extremely young and attractively impertinent. She may n't care a rap for him; she says she does n't, so I suppose she knows her own mind; still, the contrast between our years is in his favour, and with him under my nose as well as continuously underfoot, I see myself as (I fear) others see me. Yet I may not be able to keep my head if a chance should come. And if I lose it — my head, I mean — that 's the time to take your advice.

We have been seeing some fine country of late; Dunster was one of the best bits, also grand old Luttrell Castle, which, by the way, is Hardy's Stancy Castle in "The Laodicean." There are some rare old buildings in Dunster which reek history. The church has a noble rood screen; and the Yarn Market is unique in England; so is the queer old "Nunnery," so-called, and the ancient inn where we stayed.

Cleve Abbey is only a few miles away, and I was surprised at the magnificence of the ruin, which was used as a farmhouse for years, and would be thus degraded still if it were n't for Mr. Luttrell, the owner of Dun-

ster Castle, who has bought and restored it. Cistercian, and as old as the tenth century, with a gatehouse of Richard the Second's day; bits of exquisite encaustic tiling from the demolished church, preserved religiously under glass; and a refectory roof to enchant artists and archæologists — beautiful hammer-beams and carved angels of Spanish walnut wood, fifteenth century, I think; and some shadowy ghosts of frescoes.

Ellaline was enchanted with the old custodian, who talked much about "heart of oak," and when she ventured to remark that he "looked as if he were made of it," she and the old fellow himself both blushed amusingly.

We came on through pretty, respectable-looking Williton, where lived Reginald Fitz Urse who helped murder St. Thomas of Canterbury, and where everything is extraordinarily ancient except the motor garage.

By this we were among the Quantock Hills; and the differences between Devonshire and Somerset scenery were beginning to be very marked. It 's difficult to define such differences; but they 're visible in every feature; the shape of the downs; the trees, standing up tall and isolated in "Zummerzet," like landmarks; even the conformation of roads — which, by the way, are extremely good in these regions, a pleasant change for the car after some of her wild hill-climbing and tobogganning feats in North Devon.

Do you remember how, when we were boys, we discussed favourite names, and placed Audrey high in the list among those of women? Here, in the Quantock Hills, they spell it "Audrie," for the saint who patronizes West Quantoxhead; and I have learned that it was

"The Yarn Market is unique in England"

the name which the outlawed Doone tribe best loved to give their girl children. I think I used to say I should like to marry a girl named Audrey, but never heard of such a person in real life, until Ellaline informed me, on seeing St. Audrie's, that it 's the name of her most intimate friend. I responded by confessing my boyish resolve, and to amuse myself, asked if she would some day introduce me to her friend. "Not for the world!" said she, and blushed. I wish I could make myself believe her jealous. You would probably encourage me to think it!

Wordsworth loved the pleasant region of the Quantock hills, you know, and wrote some charming poems while he and Coleridge lived at Nether Stowey and Alforden; but just to see, in passing, Nether Stowey looks unattractive; and as for Bridgewater, not much farther on (where a red road has turned pink, then pale, then white with chalk), it is as commercial to look at as it is historical to read of. When a boy, in bloodthirsty moods, I used to pore over that history; read how Judge Jeffreys lodged at Bridgewater during the Bloody Assizes (the house is gone now, washed away like an old blood stain); how the moor between Weston and Bridgewater (in these days lined with motors) was lined with Feversham's gibbets after Sedgemoor. Does n't Macaulay refer to that as "the last fight deserving the name of battle, fought on English soil"? Then there was the story of "Swayne's Jumps," which one connected with Bridgewater. He made his famous escape in Toxley Wood, close by, and to this day the place is marked with three stones. That sort of thing rushes you back

in a minute over long distances in time, does n't it? — as motors rush you forward in a minute over long distances of space.

So to Glastonbury, by way of Poland Hill, looking down over the Sedgemoor plain, Chedzoy Church, on whose southern buttress the battle axes were sharpened, and Weston Zoyland, with its Dutch-sounding name, and Dutch-looking dykes.

I never saw Glastonbury until now, and I 'm not sure that, having seen it, I shan't be obliged to hook it on top of Winchester, on my bump of reverence. Not that one can compare its ruined grandeur with well-preserved Winchester, the comparison lies in the oldness and the early beginnings of religion. I believe Glastonbury is the one religious institution in which Briton, Saxon, and Norman all share and share alike; so the place seems to bind our race to a race supplanted. St. Dunstan is the "great man" of the place, because he it was who restored the monastery after Danish wars; but he is a modern celebrity beside Joseph of Arimathea, the founder, who came with eleven companions to bring the Holy Word to Britain. It was the Archangel Gabriel who bade him found a church in honour of the Virgin; and it was a real inspiration of the archangel's; for what one can see of the chapel of St. Joseph is absolutely perfect — a gem of beauty.

We came to Glastonbury in the afternoon, having lunched at a nice old coaching house in Bridgewater, and after pausing for a look at the Abbot's kitchen, I drove straight to the George, which I had heard of as being the Pilgrim's Inn of ancient times, and the best

bit of domestic architecture in the town. The idea was to have tea there — an indulgence for which Emily clamoured, being half choked with chalky dust; but the house was so singularly beautiful and interesting that it seemed a crime not to sleep in it. The front is a gorgeous mass of carved panelling; in the middle rises a four-centred gateway, and on the left is a marvel of a bow window, with a bay for every story. We went up a newel stairway to look at rooms, and one in which Henry VIII. slept a night fell to my share — not because I was selfishly ready to take the best, however, for there were several others more curious, if not more interesting.

Our quarters for the night selected, we went out sight-seeing, on foot, first taking the Abbey and Chapel of the Blessed Virgin, corruptly known as St. Joseph's. It 's a good thing, Pat, that you did n't get your youthful way, and annex Emily, because you have, or had, a "strong weakness" for ruins, and she does n't appreciate them in any form. The difference between her expression and Ellaline's while gazing at what is left of Glastonbury's glory was a study. Emily's bored, yet conscientiously desiring to be interested; the girl's rapt, radiant. And, indeed, these remnants of beauty are pathetically fair enough to draw tears to such young eyes as hers. They are even more majestic in ruin than they could have been in noblest prime, I think, because those broken arches have the splendour of classic tragedy. They are like a poem of which a few immortal lines are lost.

In the warm light of the August afternoon the old stones, pillars, and arches of Glastonbury Abbey seemed

to be carved in stained ivory, a bas relief on lapis lazuli. We lingered until our pretty Mrs. Senter got the look in her eyes of one who has stood too long in high-heeled boots, and Emily asked plaintively whether we were not going to see the Glastonbury Thorn. It appeared that she had promised to write her tame parson about it, and send him a sprig for planting; and she was much disappointed when she heard that the "original thorn," Joseph of Arimathea's blossoming staff, had been destroyed centuries ago on Weary-All Hill, where the saintly band rested on the way to Glastonbury. One trunk of the famous tree was hewed down by a Puritan in Elizabeth's day (I 'm happy to tell you he lost a leg and an eye in the act), while the second and only remaining one was destroyed by a "military saint" in the great rebellion. "What disagreeable things saints have done!" exclaimed Ellaline, which shocked Emily. "There have been very few *military* ones, anyhow," my sister returned, mildly, with a slightly reproachful glance at me, aimed at my spiritual failures. I cheered her up by promising that I would get her a sprig of thorn at Wells, and telling her how all the transplanted slips have the habit of blossoming on Christmas Day, old style — January 6th, is n't it?

Our next "sight" was the museum in the Market Place; and you may take my word for it, Pat, there 's nothing much more interesting to be found the world over, if you 're interested in antiquities, as you and I are. There 's the Alfred jewel, which, of course, the women liked best; and next in their estimation came the bronze mirrors, the queer pins and big needles, the

rouge pots and the hair curlers (which Emily gravely pronounced to be curiously like Hinde's) of the Celtic beauties who lived before the visits of those clever commercial travellers, the Phœnicians. These relics were taken from the prehistoric village at Godnet Marsh, discovered only about sixteen years ago, and they were found with others far more important; for instance, a big, clumsy canoe of black oak, which was soft as soap when it first came up out of its hiding-place in the thick peat bog, but was hardened afterward by various scientific tricks. I confess to more interest in the dice boxes and dice, some of which the sly old Celtic foxes had loaded. Cheating is n't precisely a modern device, it seems!

After the museum, I took the party to a jeweller's I 'd heard of, and bought some copies of the sacred treasures: a replica of the Alfred jewel; a silver bowl, exactly imitating a bronze one from the lake village — probably of Greek manufacture, brought over by Phœnicians — and other quaint and interesting things. Ellaline is to have the jewel; the silver bowl is to be a "sop" to Mrs. Senter; and for Emily is a tiny model oven, such as the Phœnicians taught the Celts to make and Cornish cottagers bake their bread in to this day.

There was the old Red Lion Inn to see, too, where Abbot Whiting lay the night before his execution, which was a murder; and the Women's Almshouses, and a dozen other things which tourists are expected to see besides many dozen which they are not; and it is for the latter that Ellaline and I have a predilection. She and I are also fond of believing any story which is inter-

esting, therefore we are both invaluable victims to the custodians of museums and other show places. The nice old fellow in the Glastonbury museum was delighted with our faith, which would not only have moved mountains, but transported to such mountains any historic celebrity necessary to impress the picture. We believed in the burying of the original Chalice, from which to this hour flows a pure spring, the Holy, or Blood Spring. We believe that St. Patrick was born, and died on the Isle of Avalon; and more firmly than all, that both Arthur and Guinevere were buried under St. Mary's (or St. Joseph's) Chapel. Why, did n't the custodian point out to us, in the picture of an ancient plan of the chapel, the actual spot where their bodies lay? What could we ask more than that? But if we go to Scotland next year, we shall doubtless believe just as firmly that Arthur rests there, in spite of the record at Glastonbury, in spite even of Tennyson:

> ". . . the island valley of Avilon;
> Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
> Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
> And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
> Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

Does that come back to you, from Arthur's speech to Bedévere? but he died of the "grievous wound" after all; and the custodian goes so far as to assert, solemnly, that when the coffins were opened in the days of Henry II. the bodies of the king and queen were "very beautiful to see, for a moment, untouched by time; but that

in a second, as the people looked, their dust crumbled away, all except the splendid golden hair of Guinevere, which remained to tell of her glory, for many a long year, until it was stolen, and disappeared forever."

That is a good story, anyhow, and adds to the curious, almost magical enchantment of Glastonbury. Ellaline says that the very name of Glastonbury will after this ring in her ears like the sound of fairy bells, chiming over the lost lake that ringed the Isle of Avalon. You know, I dare say, that Glastonbury is supposed to have its derivation from British "Ynyswytryn," "Inis vitrea," the "Island of Glass," because the water surrounding it was blue and clear as crystal. So many golden apples grew in the island orchards, that it became also the Isle of Avalon, from "Avalla" an apple.

Even now, the queer conical, isolated hills of the neighbourhood are called islands, and it is easy to picture Glastonbury as an isle rising among lesser ones out of a bright, azure estuary stretching away and away to the Bristol Channel. The Saxon king, Edgar, whose royal castle has given the name to the town of Edgarly, must have had a fine view in his day. And now you have only to go up Tor Hill (a landmark for miles round, with its tower of St. Michael on top like the watch-dog of a dead king) to see Wells Cathedral to the north, the blue Mendips east and west, and cutting the range, a mysterious break, like a door, which means the wild pass of Cheddar; far in the west, a gleam of the Bristol Channel; south, the Polden Hills, the Dorset heights beyond, and the Quantocks overtopped by the peak of Dunkery Beacon. I think one would have to go

far to see more of England in one sweep of the eye. Indeed, foreigners might come, make a hasty ascent of Tor Hill, and take the next boat back to their own country, telling their friends not untruthfully that they had "seen England."

At night, in the room of Henry VIII., I dreamed I saw Anne Boleyn, with Ellaline's face, which smiled at me, the lips saying: "I 'll forgive you, if you 'll forgive me." I hope that 's a good omen?

We gave ourselves twenty-four hours in Glastonbury and the neighbourhood, running out to the prehistoric village at Godney Marsh, to see the excavations, and to Meare (by the by, the very causeway over which our motor spun was built of stones from the Abbey!) then on, toward evening, to Wells. There have been surprisingly blue evenings lately, to which Ellaline has drawn my attention; and her simile on the way to Wells, that we seemed to be driving through a pelting rain of violets, I thought rather pretty. What shall I do, I wonder, if I have to part with her — give her to some other man, perhaps? It hardly bears thinking of. And yet it may easily happen. It seems to me that every man who sees her must want her; and the feeling does n't make for peace or comfort. I suppose I might be different, and less the brute, if I had n't lived so long in the East, growing used to Eastern customs; but as it is, when I see some man's eyes light upon her face and rest there in surprised admiration, I want to snatch her up, wrap her in a veil, and run off with her in my arms. Beastly, is n't it? I have no such feeling, however, in connection with Mrs. Senter, although she is very

striking, and excites a good deal of attention wherever we go.

I have n't seen Emily so happy since we have been motoring as she is at Wells, and it seems almost criminal to tear her away, though I fear I shall have to do so to-morrow. She says that, except at home, she has never felt such "an air of religious calm" as at Wells; and there 's something in the feeling which I can understand, though I must admit I don't go about the world searching for religious calm.

Certainly one can't imagine a crime being committed at Wells, and a wicked thought would be rather wickeder here than elsewhere. Not that the Cathedral is to me alluringly beautiful (I believe it ranks high, and is even exalted as the "best secular church" to be found the world over, the west front being glorified as a masterpiece beyond all others in England); at first sight it vaguely disappointed me. I am no expert judge of architecture, and don't pretend to be; still, I dare to have my likes and dislikes; and it was not until I 'd walked round the cathedral many times, stood and stared at it, and gone up heights to survey it from different points of view, that I began to warm toward it mightily. Now, I find it eminently noble, yet not so lovable as some which my memory cherishes, some not perhaps as architecturally or artistically perfect. But you know what individuality buildings have, especially those which are vast and dominating; and Wells is unique. As the common people say, it "wants knowing."

Emily, usually sparing of adjectives, pronounces the Lady Chapel "a dream," and I don't think she exag-

gerates; but for myself, the things least forgettable in the Cathedral will be the Chapter House Stairs and the beautiful fourteenth century glass. The ascent of the staircase is an exquisite experience, and, as Ellaline cried out in her joy, "it must be like going up a snow mountain by moonlight." The old clock in the transept, too, holds one hypnotized, waiting always to see what will happen next. Peter Lightfoot, the Glastonbury monk, who made it in the fourteenth century, must have had a lively imagination, and have loved excitement — "something doing," as Americans say. Ellaline and I are overcome with sympathy for one of four desperately fighting knights who never gets the colours. Hard luck to work like that for hundreds of years, and never succeeed!

At last Emily has seen the Glastonbury Thorn, and obtained her slip, as an exceptional favour. She longs for Christmas to come, to know if it will bloom, as it does regularly every year in the gardens of the Bishop's palace.

Until now I could n't have imagined envying a bishop, but to live in the palace at Wells, and own the palace gardens for life, would be worth a few sacrifices. I should think there could have been never a more poetical or charming garden on earth—not excepting Eden or a few Indian gardens I have admired. It is perfect; as Ellaline says, even pluperfect, in its contrast with the gray ruins, and the mellow, ancient house. There is an embattled wall, which makes a terrace walk, above the fair lawns and jewelled flower beds, and from the top as you walk, the hills girdling the old

city go waving in gradations of blue to an opal horizon. There 's an old Well House in the garden, which is one of its chief ornaments, and has adorned it since the fifteenth century. Bishop Beckington — the Beckington of the punning rebus (Beacon and Tun) built it to supply water to the city. But there were plenty of other springs, always — seven famous ones — which suggested the name, Wells; and had they not existed, perhaps King Ina (who flourished in the eighth century, and was mixed up in Glastonbury history) would not have founded a cathedral here. Blessed be the seven wells, then, for without them one of the fairest places in England might never have existed.

I had heard of the celebrated swans, and as I knew she would like them, I determined to pay the birds a morning call (the day after we arrived) with Ellaline. From any obtrusion of Emily's I felt safe, for her mind whirls here with old oak carvings, Flaxman sculptures, ancient vestments, carven tombs, and, above all, choral services. Indeed, Emily is never at her best except in a cathedral; and I knew that swans would not be ecclesiastic enough to please her. But of Mrs. Senter and Dick I had to be more wary; for the lady, no doubt because she is my guest, feels it polite to give me a good deal of her society; and Dick naturally considers that Ellaline's time is wasted on me, especially when he is n't by to alleviate the boredom.

My one chance was to lure the girl out early, for neither Mrs. Senter nor Burden loves the first morning hours. With all the guilty tremors of one who cooks an intrigue, I sent a note to Ellaline's room, just after

she had gone to bed, asking if she were "sporting enough" to come for a walk at seven-thirty. I thought that way of putting the invitation would fetch her, and it did; but perhaps a card I enclosed had something to do with her prompt acceptance. I printed, in my best imitation of engraved text, "Mr. and Mrs. Swan and the Misses Cygnet, At Home, In the Moat, Bishop's Palace. Ring for Refreshments. R.S.V.P."

Five minutes later came down a scrap of paper (all she had, no doubt) with a little pencil scrawl, saying that Miss Lethbridge was delighted to accept Mr. and Mrs. Swan's kind invitation for seven-thirty, and thanked Sir Lionel Pendragon for obtaining it. I have put this away with my treasures, of course.

I was at the place appointed before the time, and she did n't keep me waiting. As a matter of fact, she 's always extraordinarily prompt. Modern school training, I suppose, as Ellaline the First was never known to be in time for anything. And the swans were worth getting up for. They are magnificent creatures; but, unlike many professional beauties, they 're as clever as they are handsome. For generations they and their ancestors have been trained to ring a bell when they breakfast; and to see the whole family, mother, babies, and cousins, breasting the clear, lilied water, and waiting in a dignified, not too eager, row while father pulls a bell in the old palace wall, tweaking the string impatiently with his beak, is better than any theatrical performance of this season in London.

Ellaline was entranced, and would have the play played over and over again by the swan actors and the

stage manageress, a kindly and polite woman who conducted the entertainment. When we were both ashamed to beg for more, Ellaline suggested a walk round the town, which is of an unspoiled beauty, and you can guess whether or no I was glad to be her guide. I 'm certain I should have proposed before breakfast (I wonder if any other man was ever in love enough for that?) if Dick Burden and his aunt had n't turned a corner at the critical moment. But perhaps it was just as well. In spite of what you say, I am certain she would have refused me.

Nevertheless, for your encouragement, my dear old Pat, I am

Yours ever gratefully,

PEN.

XXVI

MRS. SENTER TO HER SISTER, MRS. BURDEN

Empire Hotel, Bath,
August Without End, Amen!

My Dear Sis: Talk about a land where it is always afternoon! Seems to me it will never stop being August. I 'm dead sick of motoring in present company, and so furious with Sir Lionel that the only revenge I can think of is to marry him. Would that I could say, "Vengeance is mine"; but it 's still a bird in the bush, I regret to say, while in my hand is nothing save the salt which I 'm trying to sprinkle on its tail.

Curious feeling one has on a motor tour. I have the sensation of being detached from my own past (good thing that, for *some* ladies of our acquaintance!) like a hook that 's come out of its eye. The hook, however, is quite ready to fit into any new eye that happens to be handy, or dig out any eye that happens to be in the way. And that brings me back to Mademoiselle Lethbridge. It really can't be good for one's liver to dislike anyone as much as I have grown to dislike that girl; but unfortunately I can't afford to despise her. She is clever; almost too clever, for cherished, protected, schoolgirl nineteen. Would that I could find a screw loose in her history! Would n't I make it rattle? I

thought I had got hold of one, through the Tyndals, but Sir Lionel would n't listen to the rattling, would n't let it rattle for an instant. It is only the change of climate and English food that prevents his manners from being (as no doubt they were in Eastern climes) those of a Bashaw; and if he were one's husband he could n't be more disagreeable than he is at times.

Not that he means to be disagreeable. If he did, one would know how to take him — or not to take him. But it is his polite indifference to which I object. I 'm not used to it in men. It 's like a brick wall you 're dying to kick against, only it 's no use. I don't take all the trouble I do with my hair and complexion not to be looked at, I assure you. Why, my waist might just as well be two inches bigger for all he notices! It is too trying. And then, to see the way he looks at that girl, who does n't know enough about physical economy to make powder stick on her nose when it rains!

It does me good to talk to you like this. Dick is n't sympathetic, because he happens to be in love with the young female, and though he occasionally abuses her himself, on the spur of a snub, he won't let me do it.

Don't think, however, that I give up hope. By no means. I have heaps of tricks up my sleeve, small and fashionable as it is, and lots of strings to my bow. But I just wish one was a "bowstring" and round a girl's neck. I 'd give a tiny, tiny pull. In fact, I *did* give one yesterday — one which I 've been wanting to give ever since I received your letter. But actually, till yesterday, I never got a chance. I "made" several,

but they always went to bits, like a child's house of cards. Poor me! That is part of the creature's cleverness. I think she knew by instinct that I had something nasty to say, and she kept dodging about, preventing me from laying hands (I won't say claws) on her.

Dick, too, she has kept in the same position, waiting for an opportunity to pounce. Indeed, she has handled us both surprisingly well, considering her age and bringing up. I have a certain respect for her. But one often respects people one dislikes, does n't one? At least, really nice, amusing people of my type do.

Exactly what Dick wants to do with his white mouse when he has pounced on it I have no means of knowing, for since a slight misunderstanding, not to say row, which we had on the night of his return from Scotland and you, a certain reserve has fallen between us, like a stage curtain. He is on the stage side; I am in the position of audience. But I was never in doubt for a moment as to what would follow *my* pounce, provided the mouse did n't prove too strong for me — and I don't think it has. My pretty little ladylike bite must have left a mark on the velvet fur.

I dare say I have excited your curiosity by referring to a "row" with Dick, and lest you neglect my interests in the rest of the letter, to brood upon his, I 'd better pander at once to your maternal anxiety.

He would n't have confessed to me anything you had told him about Miss Lethbridge's antecedents, for the very good reason that he hangs onto her with the grip of a bulldog on a marrow-bone; but as I was armed with your letter (I found it waiting for me at Bideford)

containing full information, he saw it was no use to keep anything back.

If I had had the letter a little earlier I might not have racked my valuable brain as violently as I did to give him a chance alone with Ellaline. I arranged for him to find her deserted at King Arthur's Castle, like Mariana in her moated grange; but on reading what you had to say, I admit I had qualms as to the wisdom of my policy where Dick's future was concerned. However, even then I trusted to myself to save him if it came to the worst; and it might have been valuable for my future if things had happened "according to schedule" — just because Sir Lionel *is* such a Bashaw. He would never again have felt the same to the girl if she had schemed to be left behind in order to meet Dick. However — I can control most men, and many women, but I can't control trains; and it was through their missing connections that Dick missed rescuing his ladylove. As it has turned out, no harm has been done to him. I wish I could be as sure of myself; for Sir Lionel, I fancy, has n't been quite as nice since. He can't guess what I had to do with the affair; but — I suppose even men have instinct, inferior to ours though it be.

Dick came to my room at Bideford, and was cross because things had gone wrong; I was cross because he was cross (I hate injustice in anyone but myself), and then he was crosser because I told him it would never do for him to marry the girl, knowing what we now know. He said he would have her, and hang everybody else, especially Sir Lionel; I argued that hanging people would do no good; and he then said that it would

be all right anyhow about the *dot*, as he knew a way of getting something decent out of Sir Lionel for her. What he knew he firmly refused to divulge, and when I asked if he 'd told you, he replied that he jolly well had n't. Also he accused me of "stinginess," in not wanting "Pendragon to part," and wishing to keep the "whole hog" for myself; his delicate way of expressing my desire to retain the means of purchasing tiaras, etc., suitable to my rank, in case I should become the future Lady Pendragon.

At this point in the conversation our family relations were somewhat strained, but before they reached snapping point, with my accustomed tact (partly learned from you) I smoothed my nephew down, regardless of my own injured feelings. Nothing could be better for me than that he should be engaged to Miss Lethbridge, though, of course, nothing could be worse for us all than that he should marry her. Trust me, I say again, as I have said before, to prevent that. I assure you, I can easily do it. Meanwhile, I encourage Dick to believe that he has softened my hard heart; and though he does n't believe in me absolutely, or tell me all the workings of his mind, I 'm certain you need have no anxiety about your son and heir.

Now to my own affairs, which, after Dick's future and your neuralgia, I flatter myself are dear to you.

You 've often remarked that I 'm nothing if not dramatic, and perhaps when I tell you what I did yesterday you will think I 've proved it for the hundredth — or is it the thousandth? — time.

We left Wells (which depressed me as all cathedral

towns do, because everybody, and even every building, seems so unco guid) to run through the Cheddar ravine, which, I fancy, though I don't know and care less, is among the Mendip Hills. I woke up with a headache, not having slept on account of a million church clocks and bells which were deadly busy all night, and I felt I should be no better until I 'd had it out with the enemy.

Sir Lionel, as you know, can be a pleasant companion when he chooses, and he 's so good-looking in his soldier way that I can't help admiring him when I 'm not hating him, but it is a strain on the nerves, headache or no headache, sitting next a man and trying every minute to make him like you better than he does the woman he wants to be with, who is sitting behind him. It means that you must be amusing and witty and interested in everything he says. But how can you be witty when the only thing you want to say is "devil and damn," of which he would violently disapprove from a lady's lips (or pen)? And how can you be interested in all he says when he discourses about mouldy old saints, and legends, and history, and things over and done with long ago, like that? What do I care if St. Dunstan — of whom I heard too much at Glastonbury — saved King Edmund, hunting in the Mendips, from falling over Cheddar Cliff, horse and man? Why, I don't even know who Edmund was, or when he happened. Celtic relics, found in caves, are less than nothing to me, and Roman coins are a mere aggravation when one is bothered how to get current coin of the realm. Botany bores me, too, though I have been

studying it, together with many other dull things which, unfortunately for me, Sir Lionel likes.

Well, we went up the Mendip Hills by way of an obscure little village called Priddy, which seemed important to Sir L. because they found some lead pigs in a mine there marked Imp. Vespasianus, and a few old Roman dice, and brooches like safety-pins. It would be much more to the point if he would take an interest in what *I* wear, rather than concentrating his attention on the way B. C. Roman miners or soldiers contrived to fasten their rags together. It would console one for invariably losing one's pins and hatpins when one wants them most, if one could think future generations would grow emotional over them. Yet, on the whole, I should prefer it done by a certain man in my own generation.

The moment we got away from Priddy, where a lot of starfish roads come together, my spirits rose. The country began to look theatrical, which was a pleasant change after Wells, and all my native dramaticness began to surge in me. I felt on my mettle; and when Sir Lionel talked about visiting the Cheddar Caverns I said to myself: "My name is n't Gwen Senter if I don't get hold of the girl in a cave, and tell her a thing or two." It can't be easy to escape from people in caves, I thought; and so it proved. But I have n't come to that, yet.

I really enjoyed the Cheddar Ravine. It is the sort of scenery that appeals to me. Hills rose, wild and rocky, shutting in our road, and brigands would have been appropriate, as in some mountain pass of Spain.

There were sheer gray cliffs like castles and burnt-out churches, and watch-towers.

Said Sir Lionel: "Here we come, straight from one of the finest cathedrals made by man, to see what Nature can do in the way of ecclesiastical architecture; façades here as fine as any west front, and vaguely rich with decoration." I purred, of course, agreeing, and pointing out graceful spires, empty niches for saints, tombs for cardinals, and statues of kings and bishops with crowned and mitred heads, babbling on thus with hurried intelligence, lest Ellaline should jump in ahead.

It 's the kind of place — this weird alley of colourful rock — where you feel things must happen, and I determined they *should* happen; a hidden place you are surprised at being able to enter, as if the door had been shut by enchantment a few million years, and then forcibly opened for modern motorists. I used this idea on Sir Lionel, in a form too elaborate to waste on a sister, and made a distinct hit. But Ellaline got in a little deadly work at the first cave. She began talking fairy talk with Sir Lionel, and that not being my style, I had to let her have her head.

Fancy *my* pretending to be a child who, having lost itself, suddenly sees a hole in a rock, crawls in for shelter from beasts of the forest, and finds that by accident it has stumbled on the entrance to fairyland! But Miss Lethbridge had quite a fairy game with Sir Lionel, who, she played, was his ancestor King Arthur, carried to this strange place by the four queens who rowed his body across the lake. "You can be one of the queens, if you like," she graciously said to me. "And

dear Mrs. Norton another?" I suggested. That turned the budding drama into farce, as I meant it should.

It was a weird cave, and would have served excellently for my purpose; but when I heard there was another to follow — as servants say of the next course for dinner — I thought it would be an anti-climax to use this one. Besides, there were a good many people in it. There were tricky illuminations to show off the best formations, one of which was King Solomon's Temple, King S. sitting with folded arms at the entrance, his knees up as if he had a pain; but being only a pink stalagmite, he could n't be expected to behave.

Having done justice to Gough's Cavern, we returned to the car, and skimmed along the splendid, rock-walled road to the next cave, which, it appears, is a deadly rival of the first. One advertises visits of Martel, the explorer; the other boasts the approval of royalty. I 'm sure they would love to have a notice up: "By appointment to the King," as if they were tailors. But what could a king do with a cave nowadays? At one time, it might have been handy to hide in, but those days and those kings are changed. I believe, by the way, Britons did hide in one or two of the Cheddar Caverns, when the Saxons were uncomfortably interested in their whereabouts, and there are bones, but I 'm glad to say we didn't see them. I hate to be reminded of what I 'm built on, and can't bear to look in the glass after seeing a skull, with or without cross-bones.

In this second cave, when Mrs. Norton was putting an appropriate prehistoric question I 'd coached her

up to ask her brother, I linked a friendly arm in Ellaline's, and bore her off under convoy.

"What a sweet, illuminated stalactite curtain!" said I, rapturously. "Does n't it look like translucent coral, and would n't you like to have a dress exactly that colour?"

Thus I managed to keep her with me, and fall behind the others, glaring at Dick so meaningly as to frighten him away when he showed signs of lingering.

My scene thus effectively set, and the two leading characters on the stage together, I lost no time in beginning to recite my lines. It was in a dark sort of rock-parlour, with some kind of an illuminated witches' kitchen or devil's cauldron to look at, and give us an excuse to pause — all very effective.

"Miss Lethbridge," I said, "I have rather a disagreeable duty to perform."

"When people tell you they have a duty to perform, it goes without saying that it 's disagreeable," she replied, with a flippancy on which I consider I have the patent.

"Have I a black on my nose, or is my dress undone at the back?"

"There is a black," said I, "but it 's not on your nose."

"On my character, perhaps?" she insinuated.

"Not exactly," said I. "But it will be on my conscience if I don't get it off. You see, you ought to know. If you don't know, you 're handicapped, and it is n't fair that a girl like you should be handicapped. I 've been trying for days to screw up my courage to

speak. In this queer place, I feel suddenly as if I could. Shall we talk here, while we have the chance?"

"You talk, please," said she. "I will do the rest." (Pert thing.) However, I took her at her word, and did what I had to do, with neatness and dispatch, as an executioner should. But the odd part was, that when I had chopped off her head with the axe you sharpened for me and posted from Scotland, registered and expressed, she hardly seemed to know it was off. She did look a little pale, though that might have been the effect of the strange light, but she thanked me pleasantly for telling her the truth, and said she quite appreciated my motive.

"I was prompted entirely by my interest in you, and because of my nephew's friendship," I said.

"Oh, yes," said she, in a voice like cream. "What else *could* it be?"

"It could be nothing else," I replied emphatically. "I 'm sure I hated distressing you, but it was that good might come. I do hope it has n't upset you too much?"

"No, not too much," said she. "But it has made me horribly — hungry!"

Really, that did stagger me! I must confess I can't tell what to make of the girl. Anyhow, she *knows*, which is the principal thing, and no matter how remarkable an actress she may be for her age, she must care. It would n't be human not to care for such a story about her own mother and father. Yet she took it so impersonally! I can't get over that. And she actually ate a good luncheon! I wonder she could swallow. But, of course, I 'd put everything as politely as I could put

such things, because I did n't want her to scream or faint. Well, I need n't have worried!

We had lunch at an inn near Cox's Cavern, with two cascades in the back garden, which is shut in by quite a private and special gorge of its own. I watched the girl as much as I dared, but she looked about as usual so far as I could make out. The only noticeable effect of our conversation was that she seemed somewhat suppressed, sat silent and thoughtful, and attempted no sallies.

Dozens of motors arrived while we were eating, gorgeous cars with resplendent chauffeurs, but there was n't one to put the bonnet of "Apollo" (as someone has named ours) out of joint; and not one chauffeur as striking as our extraordinary Bengali in his native dress.

I forgot to mention that I bound Ellaline to secrecy before I began my tale, saying that I 'd had the information in confidence. She has her faults, but I don't think she 'd break her word. She is one of those tall, upstanding, head-in-the-air creatures who pride themselves on keeping a promise till it 's mouldy.

My headache was better, after relieving my mind, and I enjoyed the run to Clifton and Bristol. We had to go through the queer old gray village of Cheddar, which was as cheesy looking as one would expect it to be; and I suppose the Market Cross we passed must have been good, as Sir Lionel would stop and take a photograph. As we turned out of the place for Axbridge, I threw a glance over my shoulder, back at the exit of the queer valley, and a carved bronze screen seemed already to have been drawn across it.

It was a fine road; Axbridge a sort of toy village whose houses might have been made for good little girls to play with; and to avoid the traffic in the main road we went by way of Congresbury, where the Milford-Joneses live. I was glad we did n't meet them driving their old pony-chaise. I should have been ashamed to bow. There was a turn which led us into a charming road, winding high among woods, then coming out where the gorge of the Avon burst upon our view. It always pleases Sir Lionel if one is enthusiastic over scenery, so I was, though I really hated going over that awfully high suspension bridge, as I detest looking down from heights. So does Mrs. Norton; but I can't afford to be classed with her, therefore I joined Ellaline in exclaiming that the bridge was glorious. I suppose it is fine, if one could only look without fear of being seasick.

We stopped all night in Clifton, in which Miss Lethbridge was interested, largely because of "Evelina," who stopped at the Hot Wells, in the "most romantic part of the story." I could n't for my life remember who wrote "Evelina"—which was awkward; and it has n't come back to me yet. I always mix the book up with "Clarissa Harlowe," and so does Dick, though, of course, he 's read neither.

We went to see a lot of things in Bristol, but the best was a church called St. Mary Redcliffe. Mrs. Norton, though tired, pined to go when she heard it was famous; and it 's as much as your life is worth to deny her a church if she wants one. The others, except Dick, said it was worth stopping for; also that they were glad they did; so somebody was pleased! And Sir L. and

E. jabbered enough history in Bristol to last a schoolmaster a week. I was quite thankful to start again, and stop the flow of intelligence, because I had n't found time to fag up Bristol and Clifton beforehand, as I do some towns.

So we came to Bath, where we 've been stopping for two days at one of the best hotels in England, and where I might enjoy a little well-earned civilization if it were n't that there are a thousand and one old houses and other "features" which Mademoiselle Ellaline pretends she yearns to visit. Of course, *I* know that all she wants is a chance to monopolize Sir L.'s society, but *he* does n't know that; and my business is not only to fight unjust monopoly, but to establish a Senter-Pendragon Trust myself. Consequently there is no rest for the wicked, and willy-nilly, I, too, gloat over relics of the past.

Luckily for me, as I have had to do more sight-seeing here than almost anywhere else, Bath is a fascinating place, and I believe it 's becoming very fashionable again. Anyhow, all the great ones of earth seem to have lived here at one time or another. I wonder if it might n't be nice for you to spend a season, taking the waters, or bathing, or whatever is the smartest thing to do? I 've noticed it 's only the very smartest thing that ever thoroughly agrees with you, and I sympathize. I have the sort of feeling that what is good for duchesses may be good for me; but if I bring off what I 'm aiming at now, Lady Pendragon shall rise on the ladder of her husband's fame and her own charm to the plane of royalties.

By the way, in nosing about among the foundations of a church here, St. Peter's — they found the wife (her

body, I mean) of that King Edmund Thingummy I never could find out about. He seems always to be cropping up!

I was in hopes we 'd only have to go back to the Roman days of Bath, as that saves trouble; but, oh no, down I must dip into Saxon lore, or I 'm not in it with the industrious Miss Lethbridge! I think the wretched Saxons had a mint here, or something, and there were religious pageants of great splendour in which that everlasting St. Dunstan mixed himself up. I tell you these things, I may explain, not because I think you will be interested, but because I want to fix them in my mind, as we have n't finished "doing" Bath yet, and are to stop another day or two.

As for Roman talk, there is no end of it among us; it mingles with our meals, which would otherwise be delicious; and in my dreams, instead of being lulled by the music of a beautiful weir under my window, I find myself mumbling: "Yes, Sir Lionel, Ptolemy should have said the place was outside, not in, the Belgic border." (Sounds like something new in embroidery, does n't it?) "Strange, indeed, that they only discovered the Roman Baths so late as the middle of the eighteenth century! And then, only think of finding the biggest and best of all, more than a hundred years later!"

I assure you, I have kept my end up with my two too-well-informed companions, and I was even able to tell Sir Lionel a legend he did n't know: about Bladud, a son of the British King Lud Hudibras, creating Bath by black magic, secreting a miraculous stone in the spring, which heated the water and cured the sick. Then Bladud

grew so conceited about his own powers that he tried to fly, and if he had succeeded there would have been no need for the Wright brothers to bother; but when he got as far as London from Bath the wing-strings broke and he fell, plop! on a particularly hard temple of Apollo. After him reigned his son, no less a person than King Lear. I got this out of a queer little old book I bought the first day we came, but I assumed the air of having known it since childhood. There 's another legend, it seems, about Bladud and a swine, but it 's less esoteric than this, and Sir Lionel likes mine better.

I do wish we had n't to spend so much time poking about in the Roman Baths, for though there are good enough sights to see there, for those who love that sort of thing, one does get such cold feet, and there are such a lot of steps up and down, one's dress is soon dusty round the bottom, and that 's a bore when one has no maid.

If I could choose, I 'd prefer the Pump Room, and would rather talk of Beau Nash and the old Assembly Rooms than of Minerva and her temple — or indeed of Pepys, or Miss Austen and Fanny Burney. By the way, "Evelina" was hers. I 've found that out, without committing myself. I wish I could buy the book for sixpence. I think I 'll try, when nobody is looking; and it ought to be easy, for we simply haunt a bookshop in Gay Street, belonging to a Mr. Meehan, who is a celebrity here. He has written a book in which Sir Lionel is much interested, called "Famous Houses of Bath," and as it seems he knows more about the place as it was in old days and as it is now than any other living

person, he has been going round with us, showing us those "features" I mentioned. He appears to have architecture of all kinds at his finger tips, and not only points out here and there what "Wood the elder and Wood the younger" did, under patronage of Ralph Allen, but knows which architect's work was good, which bad, which indifferent; and that really is beyond me! I suppose one can't have a soul for Paris fashions and English architecture too? I prefer to be a judge of the former, thanks! It 's of much more use in life.

I should think there can hardly be a street, court, or even alley of Old Bath into which we have n't been led by our clever cicerone, to see a "bit" which ought n't on any account to be missed. Here, the remains of the Roman wall, crowded in among mere, middle-aged things; there the place where Queen Elizabeth stayed, or Queen Anne; where "Catherine Morland" lodged, or "General Tilney"; where "Miss Elliot" and "Captain Wentworth" met; where John Hales was born, and Terry, the actor; where Sir Sidney Smith and De Quincey went to school; the house whence Elizabeth Linley eloped with Sheridan; the place where the "King of Bath," poor old Nash, died poor and neglected; and so on, ad infinitum, all the way to Prior Park, where Pope stayed with Ralph Allen, rancorously reviling the town and its sulphur-laden air. So now you can imagine that my "walking and standing" muscles are becoming abnormally developed, to the detriment of the sitting-down ones, which I fear may be atrophied or something before we return to motor life.

Sir Lionel has remarked that Bath is a "microcosm

of England," and I hastened to say "Yes, it is." Do you happen to know what a microcosm means? Dick says it 's a conglomeration of microbes, but he is always wrong about abstract things unconnected with Sherlock Holmes.

By this time you will be as tired of Bath as if you had pottered about in it as much as I have, and won't care whether it had two great periods — Roman and eighteenth century — or twenty, inextricably entangled with the South Pole and Kamchatka. *More* tired than I, even, for I have got a certain amount of satisfaction to the eye from the agreeable, classic-looking terraces and crescents, and the pure white stone buildings that glitter on the hillsides overlooking the Avon. That is the sort of background which is becoming to me, and as I had all my luggage meet me in Bath, I have been able to dress for it; whereas Miss Lethbridge has done most of her exploring in blue serge.

In a day or two we are off again — Wales sooner or later, I believe, though I ask no questions, as I don't care to draw attention to my own future plans. We were asked for a fortnight, and I am not troubling my memory to count by how many days we have overstayed — not our welcome, I hope — but our invitation. You will wonder perhaps why I "overstay," since I frankly admit that I 'm "fed up" with too much scenery and too much information. Yet no, you are far too clever to wonder, dear Sis. You will see for yourself that I must go on, like "the brook," until Sir Lionel asks me to go on — as Lady Pendragon. Or else until I have to abandon hope. But I won't think of that. And I

am being so nice to Mrs. Norton (whenever necessary) that I think she has forgiven me the colour of my hair, and will advise her brother to invite me to make a little visit at Graylees Castle, where it is understood the tour eventually comes to an end. When this end may arrive the god of automobiles knows. A chauffeur proposes; the motor-car disposes. And the Woman-in-the-Car never reposes — when there 's another woman and a man in the case.

Your-enduring-to-the-end,

GWEN.

P.S.—That was an inspiration of mine about the Cheddar Cavern, was n't it? I have another now, and will make a note of it. N.B.— Get Sir L. to take me to see the ruins of Tintern Abbey by moonlight (if any) and while there induce him to propose, or think he has done so. I have a white dress which would just suit.

XXVII

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Tintern Abbey, August 27th

Dearest Saint: We 're not exactly living in Tintern Abbey; that would be too good to be true, and would also annoy the rooks which cry and cry always in the ruins, as if they were ghosts of the dead Cistercian monks, clothed not in white, but in decent black, ever mourning their lost glory. But we are in a perfect duck of a hotel, covered with Virginia creeper, and as close by as can be. We arrived this afternoon, and have had an hour or two of delightful dawdling in the Abbey. Soon we are to have an early dinner, which we shall bolt if necessary, so that we may go in again by moonlight, before the moon escapes. I have dressed quickly, because I wanted to begin a letter to you. I shan't have time to finish it, but I 'll do that when we 've come back from the heavenly ruins, with moonlight in my pores and romance in my soul. I ought to write a better letter in such a mood, ought n't I? And I do try to write nice letters to my Angel, because she says such dear, kind things about them, and also because I love her better every day.

We 've seen quantities of beautiful things and places since I wrote you last, darling. To think them over

is like drawing a long gold chain, strewn at intervals with different precious stones, through the fingers, slowly, jewel by jewel. The gold chain is our road and the beautiful beads are the places, of course. I can say "draw them slowly through the fingers," because we don't scorch. We are out to see the "fair face of England," not to scurry over it like distracted flies.

I don't remember many "jewels" on the way to Gloucester from Bath through Cold Aston and Stroud; but if I were properly up in history, no doubt I should have noted more than I did; yet Gloucester itself was a diamond of the first water. I feared to be disappointed in the Cathedral, so soon after exquisite Wells and the Abbey at Bath, which I loved. But as soon as I got inside it was quite otherwise, especially as I had Sir Lionel to show me things, and he knew Gloucester of old. To me, the interior was almost as interesting as Winchester itself (which, so far, has outranked all), for the transition from one period to another is so clearly and strangely marked, and it 's the actual birthplace of Perpendicular architecture. The Cloisters must be among the loveliest in the world; and there 's a great, jewelled window which leaves a gorgeous scintillating circle in my mind's eye, just as the sun does on your body's eye, when you have looked in the face of its glory. Oh, and the extraordinary stone veil, with its gilded ornamentation! I shan't forget that, but shall think of it when I am old. There is an effect as of tall rows of ripe wheat bending toward one another, gleaming as wheat does when the breeze blows and the sun shines.

We heard the choir singing, an unseen choir of boys

and men; and the voices were like shafts of crystal, rising, rising, rising, up as far as heaven, for all I know.

Don't you feel that the voice of a boy is purer, more impersonal and sexless, somehow, than the clearest soprano of a woman, therefore exactly fulfilling our idea of an angel singing?

Think of Gloucester having been laid out on the same plan as the prætorian camp at Rome! They 've proved it by a sketch map of Viollet le Duc's; and under the city of the Saxons, and mediæval Gloucester, lies Gloucestra — "Fair City" — of the Romans. You can dig bits of its walls and temples up almost anywhere if you go deep enough, people say. It must have been an exciting place to live in when Rome ruled Britain, because the fierce tribes from Southern Wales, just across the Severn, were always spoiling for a fight. But now one can't imagine being excited to any evil passion in this shrine of the great "Abbey of the Severn Lands." The one passion I dared feel was admiration; admiration everywhere, all the way through from the tomb of Osric the Woden who founded the abbey, to the New Inn (which is very old, and perfectly beautiful; in the ancient streets, at the abbot's gateway, all round the Cathedral, inside and out, pausing at the tombs (especially that of poor murdered King Edward II., who was killed at Berkeley Castle only a few miles away), and so on and on, even into the modern town which is inextricably tangled with the old.

There are quantities of interesting and lovely places, according to Sir Lionel, where one ought to go from Gloucester, especially with a motor, which makes seeing

things easier than not seeing them; there 's Cheltenham, with a run which gives glorious views over the Severn Valley; and Stonebench, where you can best see the foaming Severn Bore; and Tewkesbury, which you 'll be interested to know is the Nortonbury of an old book you love — "John Halifax, Gentleman"; and Malvern; and there 's even Stratford-on-Avon, not too far away for a day's run. But Sir Lionel has news that the workmen will be out of Graylees Castle before long, and he says we must leave some of the best things for another time; Oxford and Cambridge, for instance; and Graylees is so near Warwick and Kenilworth and Stratford-on-Avon that it will be best to save them for separate short trips after we have "settled down at home."

How little he guesses that there 'll be no settling down for me — that already I have been with him longer than I expected! Whenever he speaks of "getting home," and what "we" will do after that, it gives me a horrid, choky feeling; and I 'm afraid he thinks me unresponsive on the subject of the beautiful old place which he apparently longs to have me see, because my throat is always too shut up, when it is mentioned, to talk about it. I can't do much more than say "Yes" and "No," in the absolutely necessary places, and generally show symptoms of cold in the head, if there 's a hanky handy.

Of course, I am dying to see you, dearest. You know that, without my telling, and you are everything to me — my whole world. Yet it hurts me dreadfully to know that, when Sir Lionel Pendragon is at home,

instead of carrying out the nice plans he makes each day for "us" in the future, he will be despising me heartily, and thinking me the very worst girl, without exception, who ever lived. I believe he now dislikes Bloody Queen Mary more than any other woman who ever spoiled the earth with her offensive presence; but probably she will go up one when he gets to know about me.

I don't doubt that he 'll be angry with the real Ellaline as well, but not absolutely disgusted with her, as he will be with me. Besides, whatever he feels, it won't matter to her very much, except where money is concerned, because she will be married before he knows the truth. She won't have to live in his house, or even in the same country with him, for her home will be in France with her soldier-husband. Unfortunately, I 'm afraid his opinion of her may matter in a mercenary way, for I have heard the whole story — I believe the *true* story — of Ellaline's mother and father, as connected with Sir Lionel's past.

Mrs. Senter told it, and enjoyed telling it, because she thought it would depress and take the spirit out of me. She hoped, I 'm sure, that it would make me shrink from Sir Lionel's society in shame and mortification; also she very likely fancied that I might consider myself an unfit bride for her nephew, whose attentions to me are extremely convenient for her; but she would prefer not to have them end in matrimony.

If I were Ellaline Lethbridge, with the feelings of Audrie Brendon, I should have taken the recital precisely as she expected; though really I don't think Ellaline herself, as she is, would have minded desperately, except

about the money. But being Audrie Brendon, and not Ellaline, I could have shouted for joy at almost every word that woman said, if it had n't been in a cave where shouting would have made awful echoes.

You know, dear, how I have been puzzling over Sir Lionel the Noble, as he appears to me, and Sir Lionel the Dragon, as painted by Ellaline, and how I 've vainly tried to match the pieces together. Well, thanks to Mrs. Senter's revelations, the puzzle no longer exists. Of course, long ago, I made up my mind that there was a mistake somewhere, and that it was n't on my side; still, I could n't understand certain things. Now, there *is n't one detail* which I can't understand very well; and that 's why I 'm so ready to believe Mrs. Senter's story to be true. Most disagreeable things are; and this is certainly as disagreeable for poor little Ellaline as it was meant to be disagreeable for me.

Mrs. Senter excused herself for telling me horrid tales about my people by saying that my ignorance gave me the air of being ungrateful to Sir Lionel, and unappreciative of all he had done for me. That he, being a man, was likely to blame me for extravagance and indifference to benefits received, although aware, when he actually reflected on the subject, that I sinned through ignorance. She thought (said she) that it would be only fair to tell me the whole truth, as I could then change my line of conduct accordingly; but she hoped I would n't give her away to Sir Lionel or Dick, as she was speaking for my sake.

When I had promised, she informed me that "my mother," Ellaline de Nesville, a distant cousin of Lionel

Pendragon's, was engaged to him when they were both very young. There was a lawsuit going on at the time about some tin mines in Cornwall, from which most of his money came, for the property was claimed by a man from another branch of the family, who suddenly appeared waving a marriage certificate or a will, or something melodramatic. Well, the lawsuit was decided for the other man, just about the time that Sir Lionel (who was n't Sir Lionel then) got shot in the arm and seemed likely to be a cripple for life. Both blows coming together were too much for Mademoiselle de Nesville, who was fascinating and pretty, but apparently a frightful little cat as well as flirt, so she promptly bolted with an intimate friend of her fiancé, a Mr. Frederic Lethbridge, rich and "well connected." They ran off and were married in Scotland, as Ellaline the second expects to be. (Odd how even profane history repeats itself!) And this though Mr. Lethbridge knew his friend was desperately in love with the girl.

What happened immediately after I don't know, except that Mrs. Senter says Sir Lionel was horribly cut up, and lost his interest in life. But anyhow, sooner or later, the lawsuit, which had gone to a higher court, was, after all, decided in his favour. The other man turned out to be a fraud, and retired into oblivion with his wills and marriage certificates. Meanwhile, Ellaline Number One awoke to the fact that her husband was n't as rich as he was painted, or as nice as she had fancied. Some of his people were millionaires, but he had run through a good deal of his fortune because he was mad about gambling. At first, when

the bride supposed that there was heaps of money, she enjoyed gambling, too, and they were always at Longchamps, or Chantilly, or the English race-courses, or at Aix or Monte Carlo. By and by, though, when she found that they were being ruined, she tried to pull her husband up — but it was too late; or else he was the sort of person who can't be stopped when he 's begun running down hill.

Probably she regretted her cousin by that time, as he was rich again, and likely to be richer, as well as very distinguished. And when a few years later (while our Ellaline was a baby) Frederic Lethbridge forged a millionaire uncle's name, and had to go to prison, she must have regretted Sir Lionel still more, for she was a little creature who loved pleasure, and hardly knew how to bear trouble.

Mrs. Senter said that Mr. Lethbridge had been sure the uncle would shield him rather than have a scandal in the family, and so it was a great surprise to him to be treated like an ordinary criminal. When he was sentenced to several years in prison, after a sensational trial, he contrived to hang himself, and was found stone-dead in his cell. His widow had to go and live with some dull, disagreeable relations in the country, who thought it their duty to take her and the baby for a consideration, and there she died of disappointment and galloping consumption, leaving a letter for her jilted cousin Lionel, in Bengal, which begged him to act as guardian for her child. All the money she had at her death was a few thousand pounds, of which she had never been able to touch anything but the income, about two hundred

pounds a year; and that sum, Mrs. Senter gave me to understand, constituted my sole right to consider myself an heiress.

Despite the shameful way in which she had behaved to him, Sir Lionel accepted the charge, eventually took his cousin's little girl away from the disagreeable relatives, and put her at Madame de Maluet's, where Mother Ellaline was educated and particularly desired her daughter to be educated. Not only did he pay for her keep at one of the most expensive schools in France (Madame's is that, and she prides herself on the fact), but gave her an allowance "far too large for a schoolgirl" in the opinion of Mrs. Senter's unknown (to me) informant.

Does n't this account for everything that looked strange, and for all that appeared cold-hearted, almost cruel, in Sir Lionel to Ellaline, who had heard the wrong side of the story, certainly from Madame de Blanchemain — a silly woman, I fancy — and perhaps even from Madame de Maluet, whose favourite pupil Ellaline the First was?

No wonder Sir Lionel did n't write to the child, or want her to write to him, or send her photograph, or anything! And no wonder he dreaded having her society thrust on him when Madame de Maluet hinted that it was hardly decent to keep his ward at school any longer. I even understand now why, when I show the slightest sign of flirtatiousness or skittishness, he stiffens up, and draws into his shell.

I very politely let Mrs. Senter see that I appreciated her true disinterestedness in repeating to me this tragic

family history; and of course she was a cat twice over to do it. At the same time, I never liked her so much in my life, because it was so splendid to have Sir Lionel not only justified (he hardly needed that with me, at this stage) but haloed. I think he has behaved like a saint on a stained-glass window, don't you?

I have interrupted my letter about places and things tremendously, to tell you the story as it was told to me; but it seemed to come in appropriately, and I wanted you to know it, so that you might begin to appreciate Sir Lionel at his true worth in case you have been doubting him a little up to now.

Everyone has gone down to dinner, I 'm afraid, and I must go, too, because of the Abbey afterward, and not keeping them waiting; but perhaps, if I skip soup and fish, I may stop long enough to add that after Gloucester we went to quaint old Ross, sacred to the memory of "The Man of Ross," who was so revered that a most lovely view over the River Wye has been named for him. We had lunch there, at a hotel where I should love to stay, and then passed on, along a perfect road, down the Wye, till we came to Kerne Bridge, near Goodrich Castle. There we got out, leaving Buddha as the god in the car, and walked for half a mile along a romantic path to the ruined castle. It was one of the first built in England, and there are early Norman parts of it still intact, and incredibly strong looking, as if they meant to last another thousand years. I was so interested in it, and wish whoever it may concern would leave the castle to me in his will. I would fix up a room or two and bring you there, and we 'd have that exquisite view

always under our eyes. As for servants, we could employ ghosts.

The Wye is even more charming as a river and as a valley than we used to imagine when we wanted to "do" England, before it burst upon us that most of the wherewithal was used up. Nothing could be more dreamy and daintily pretty than landscape and waterscape, though here and there is a bit which might be gray and grim if the beetling rocks were n't hatted with moss and mantled with delicate green trees. Wherever there is a boulder in the river, the bright water laughs and plays round it, as if forbidding it to look stern.

The real way to see the Wye is n't by motor, but by boat, I am sure, even though that may sound treacherous to Apollo and disloyal to my petrol; but we did the best we could, and went out of our way some miles to see Symond's Yat, a queer, delightful, white village on a part of the river which is particularly divine. There 's a splendid rock, and the Yat *is* the rock, as well as the village. Also there 's a cave; but I was n't sorry not to stop and go in, lest Mrs. Senter might seize the opportunity of telling me some other fearsome tale, less welcome than the last.

In old days it used to take a week by coach from London to Monmouth. Now, with a motor, I dare say we could do it in one long, long day, if we tried. Only it would be silly to try, because one would n't see anything, and would make oneself a nuisance as a "road hog" to everybody one met or passed. It was Monmouth we came to next, after "digressing" to Symond's Yat, and as it was nearly evening by that time, Sir Lionel decided

to stay the night. He meant to start again in the morning; but Monmouth Castle, towering out of the river, was so fine that it was a pity to leave it unvisited, particularly as Henry V., a special hero of Sir Lionel's (mine, too!) was born there. Then we took an unplanned eight-mile run to Raglan Castle, a magnificently impressive ruin; and that is why we arrived so late to-day at Tintern.

This letter has grown like Jack's beanstalk, until I think I 'd better post it on my way to dinner, instead of adding rhapsodies about moonlight in the Abbey. I won't forget to put them in though, next time I write, which will be almost immediately — if not sooner.

Your even more loving than loquacious

AUDRIE.

XXVIII

MRS. SENTER TO HER SISTER, MRS. BURDEN

Tintern Abbey

My Dear Sis: He came, the moon saw, and I — did n't conquer!

You know what I mean? I 'm sure you remember what I hoped to do at Tintern Abbey by the light of the moon; and if you are the good elder sister I think you are, I trust you prayed for my success. If you did, don't mind too much about the prayer not being answered, but try again, and give Sir Lionel "absent treatments," and all that sort of thing, because, if the moon had been properly turned on, he might have been brought to the point. For I look my best by moonlight, and have a great gift of pathos in a white light — like heroines of melodrama who always have themselves followed about by it on purpose — or else by a patch of snow. But the moon was only on at half-cock, and did n't work well, and after we had stubbed our toes on several things in dark shadows among the ruins, I just folded up my plan of campaign, and put it into my pocket until next time.

The pity of it! — when I had been at a lot of trouble to persuade Mrs. Norton that it would be damp in the Abbey, and that there exists a special kind of bat which

haunts ruins and is consumed by an invincible desire to nest in the front hair. So she stopped in the hotel; and as for Miss Lethbridge, I knew I could trust Dick to look after her. But — well, it can't be helped, and the moon is growing bigger and brighter every night. I don't know whether there were any toe-stubbing incidents in the ranks of the rear-guard; but something must have happened, for mademoiselle has come home looking *stricken*. I 'm dying to hear what 's the matter, but Dick won't tell. Perhaps she swallowed a bat!

Yours (would that I could say Sir L.'s) ever lovingly,

GWEN.

XXIX

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Tintern Abbey
Same night

After all, I 'm writing again, darling mother. I do think that Dick is an unmitigated cad. I told him so, and he said it was only because I was so unkind to him, and he was determined I should n't "chuck" him. He is hateful! It 's too horrid to be obliged to obey Dick Burden's orders, just for Ellaline's sake, when if it were n't for her I could not only tell him what I think of him, but have him sent away in disgrace. Sir Lionel would thrash him, I believe, if he knew — but it 's useless to talk about that. And as Dick gracefully reminds me, the pot can't call the kettle black. I am the pot. Oh!

I was in such a happy mood when we went into the Abbey, and so delighted that we were able to be there by moonlight, dreaming as little of what would happen as Red Riding Hood did before she met the wolf.

Sir Lionel and I started together, somehow, but the minute we were in the ruins Mrs. Senter called him to ask a question about the tombs that break the soft green carpet of grass in the long aisles. Instantly Dick pounced on me, just as his aunt did in the cave

the other day, and I could only have got away from him by showing that I d' rather be with Sir Lionel — which, of course, I would n't do.

Dick began at once accusing me of avoiding him, and keeping out of his way on purpose when he tried to speak with me alone, ever since he came back from Scotland; and I retorted flippantly: "Oh, have you only noticed that since then?"

But in a minute I wished I had n't defied him. He said, if I wanted him to be considerate, making him angry was n't the right way to set about it; and that, if I had been in his power before, I was a good deal deeper in now.

Still, I was n't so very frightened, because I 'm used to his threats, and I thought he was only "bluffing"; so I bluffed back, and laughed, saying that it did n't suit his style to be melodramatic.

"You make me want to shake you," he said, crossly.

"I know that," said I. And then he burst like a thunder-cloud — at least, his news did; the news he had been wanting to tell me since Bideford.

When he was in Scotland, *he saw Ellaline.* She had arrived with those McNamarras I told you about, and their place must be near the one where Dick's mother is visiting. He recognized her from that photograph of the school garden-party (where he saw my picture, too, you know, and was able to find out my name, and where we live in Versailles). That is, he thought he could n't be mistaken, but made sure by inquiring, until he hit upon someone who could tell him that a Mademoiselle de Nesville had come to stay with Mrs.

and Miss McNamarra. Of course, he could n't have known that Ellaline had taken the name of de Nesville, but as he had heard that de Nesville was her mother's maiden name, it was n't difficult for a budding Sherlock Holmes to put two and two together.

You see how much worse the position is now, both for Ellaline and me, and that the little wretch did n't exaggerate when he boasted that I 'm more "in his power" than ever. What a misfortune that Ellaline should have come to Scotland — so near where we shall be, too, if we go to the Roman Wall! He has only to tell the whole thing to Sir Lionel, and say: "If you don't believe it, run up to such and such a place, and there you will see the real Ellaline Lethbridge, whom perhaps you may recognize from her likeness to your cousin, her dead French mother."

If only Ellaline were safely married! But she can't be yet, for days and days, I 'm afraid. She was to have written or telegraphed me at Gloucester, if there were any chance of her soldier lover getting away sooner than last expected; but I had no word from her at all, at the Poste Restante there.

All that sounds bad enough for me, does n't it? But there 's worse to come. The wretch swears he will (as he calls it), "give the show away" to Sir Lionel to-morrow if I don't tell Sir L. myself that I have fallen in love with Dick.

I said that Sir Lionel would n't believe me if I did, because I 'd told him at Torquay I was n't in love with Dick. That admission slipped out, and Sherlock Holmes caught at it. "Ah, I thought you 'd done something to

put him off the scent!" he flashed out. "I call that downright treacherous of you; and all the more I 'll hold you down to your bargain this time. I said I 'd speak to-morrow unless you did what I told you to do, but now I say I 'll speak this minute, if you don't promise by all that 's sacred to ask him for his consent to-morrow. I 'll shout to him now. One — two — three!"

"Yes, yes, I will!" I cried — because Dick had worked himself up to such a fury that I saw that he meant what he said.

"I shall know fast enough whether you keep your word or not," he growled. "And if you don't, you understand just what you have to expect."

If I had n't given in to Ellaline! I ought to have known that nothing but trouble could some of it. Yet no — I won't wish it undone. I can't! No matter what happens, I shall never really regret what gave me the chance of meeting a man like Sir Lionel. I don't think there is another in the world. And to-morrow I am to have the honour of informing him that I 'm in love with that little worm, Dick Burden. Having seen the sun, I love a flicker of phosphorus on a sulphur match.

Do write me the minute you get this, won't you? No, telegraph if you can think of anything consoling to say. Poste Restante, Chester.

Your frightened and loving

AUDRIE.

XXX

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Aberystwith
August 29th

BRIGHTEST AND BEST: I have a short reprieve, because Dick has had to go away again; not to his mother, this time, but to London. A telegram was forwarded to him from Gloucester, where he had left sending-on instructions; and he knocked at my door early yesterday morning (at Tintern) to say he must leave immediately by the first train. He was excited, because the telegram came from the head of a firm of well-known private detectives with whom he had been in correspondence for some time, trying to buy a junior partnership for a few hundreds left him by his grandmother. There 's a chance now that he may get the partnership, only he must be on the spot, as another man is making an offer "more advantageous — in some ways." Dick is wild to get in, and regards this as the opportunity of a lifetime. Does n't that prove the type of mind he has? Actually yearning to be in business as a detective! Well, he 's had good practice lately, and I must say he has made the most of it.

"This call could n't have come at a worse time, but I must obey it," he pronounced solemnly, while I peeped

through my half-open door, in my prettiest Ellaline dressing-gown — far too nice to waste on Dick. Disgusted with life, as I was, I nearly laughed in his face, and *at* his face; but dared not quite, for fear of enraging him again just when he appeared to be in a comparatively lenient mood.

He had come to explain and apologize, and in his perky conceit really seemed to fancy that I might be hurt at his desertion. So when he asked if I would "bid him good-bye pleasantly, and remember to keep my promise," I had a small inspiration. I would bid him good-bye pleasantly, I bargained, provided he let me off keeping the promise until he should come back; because, I said, it would be humiliating to plead with Sir Lionel on the very day my *fiancé* turned his back upon me in order to attend to mere business.

"You call this *mere* business?" sputtered Dick; and I soothed him, but persisted firmly, gently, until at last he agreed to grant the reprieve. I think his own vanity, not my eloquence, obtained the concession, because it pleased him to believe that I leaned upon him in this crisis. And of course I had to promise over again, more earnestly than ever, "not to back out, but to stick to my word."

I must still stick to it, of course (unless a wire or letter from you meanwhile suggests some miraculous, agreeable, honourable alternative); but sufficient for the day is the evil thereof — and the Dick thereof.

This day and several days to come are free from both; for my albatross can't arrange the details of its partnership, sell out some investments in order to pay

the money down, and join us again before Chester. There I shall certainly hear from you; and I have such infinite faith in your dove-like serpentineness, that I let myself cling to the ragged edge of hope. Meanwhile, I shall enjoy myself as much as I possibly can, so that, at worst, I shall have more good days to remember when bad days come. For the days will be very bad indeed if I have to bear Sir Lionel's silent scorn, and still remain with him, awaiting release from Ellaline.

I felt like a different human being after Dick had gone, and would have written you at once, but he had delayed me so long that I had to finish dressing at top speed, because we were to make an earlier start than usual. There was Chepstow Castle to see (quite near, and a shame to have missed it), as well as a hundred-and-fifty-mile run to Tenby.

Chepstow was splendidly picturesque and striking; but the country through which we had to pass on the way to Tenby would not have been particularly interesting if it were n't for the legends and history with which it is as full as it is of ruined castles. It is largely coal country now, and after the lovely, winding Wye, playing hide-and-seek with its guardian hills, we might have found the road unattractive as we ran through Newport, Cardiff, Neath, Swansea, and Carmarthen. But it made all the difference in the world to know that Carmarthen was Merlin's birthplace; that stories of Arthur's exploits and knightly deeds leave golden landmarks everywhere; and that it seems quite an ordinary, reasonable thing to the people to name railway engines after Sir Lancelot. Is n't it charming of them? Yet

what would Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat, say to such a liberty, I wonder?

We arrived in Tenby too late for anything save an impression, last evening; but it was one of those enchanting, mysterious impressions which one can only have after dusk, when each old ivied wall is purple with romance, and each lamp in a high window is a lovelight.

My first thought as we came in and found Tenby on fire with sunset, was that the place looked like a foreign town set down in England; and so of course it is, for it was founded by a band of Flemish people, who fled from persecution. The huge old city walls and quaint gates put me in mind of a glorified Boulogne, or a bit of old Dinan, under the castle. And the way the town lies, with its beautiful harbour far below, its gray rocks and broken walls by the sea, in golden sands, is like Turner's ideas of historic French fortresses. The Benedictine monks, too, who come across the gleaming stretch of water from Caldy Island in a green-and-red steam yacht, add one more foreign note. And I 'm delighted to tell you that the hotel where we stayed is built upon the city wall of which nobody seems to know the date — not even the guide-books. The people we asked rather apologized for having to confess that probably it was no earlier than the twelfth century; for the twelfth century is considered crudely modern for Welsh things.

In front of my bedroom window an old lookout tower, darkly veined with ivy, stood up from the vast foundation of the stone wall; and at night I could gaze down, down, over what seemed in the moon-mist to be a mile of depth,

to an almost tropical garden laid out on the wall itself. When the tide comes in and drowns the gold of the sands, the sea breaks against the buttress of rock and stone, and the hotel seems all surrounded with the wash and foam of waters, like a fortified castle of long-ago.

We ought to have stopped more than one night and part of a next day, but there is so much, so much to do; and, as I told you, Sir Lionel's thoughts are already marching on toward home. There are all the beauty spots of Wales before us; and the Lake Country, and the North by the Roman Wall, before we turn south again for Graylees. I say "we" — but you know what I mean.

The run we had to-day, coming through Cardigan to Aberystwith, has begun to show me what Wales can do in the way of beauty when she really puts her soul to it; but Sir Lionel says it is nothing to what we shall see to-morrow. What joy that I have still a to-morrow — and a day after to-morrow — empty of Dick! Do you suppose a condemned person finds his last sip of life the sweetest in the cup? I can imagine it might be so.

You 'll be glad to get this, I 'm sure, dearest, so I 'll send it at once, with loads and loads of love from,

YOUR CRIMINAL CHILD.

P. S. I forgot to tell you that Aberystwith is n't nearly as beautiful as Tenby, but it has a castle towering over the sea, built by no one less than Gilbert Strongbow the Cruel, who grabbed all Cardiganshire for himself, and dotted castles about everywhere — or else stole other people's, which saved trouble. I know you like

to picture me wherever I am, so I must tell you at least that about Aberystwith, though describing places seems irrelevant in my present mood. I am keyed to the "top notch," and don't feel able to do anything leisurely. I do not expect to sleep to-night, and shall get up as soon as it 's light, and dart down to the beach to look for amber, or carnelian, or onyx, which they say can be found here. I asked a chambermaid of the hotel, after we arrived this evening, what all the mysterious, stooping people were doing on the sands, and she said searching for amber, to bring them luck. I hope I may come across a bit — even a tiny bit. I am needing a luck-bringer.

There was another mystery which puzzled me here: droves of pretty girls, between twelve and twenty, flitting past the windows, on "the front," every few minutes; sometimes two by two, sometimes four or five together. I thought I had never seen so many young girls. There were enough for the girl population of a large city, yet here they were all crowded together in this small watering-place. But the chambermaid has swept away the mystery. It 's a college, and the girls "live out" in different houses. At the other end of the town is another college for young men. That sounds entertaining, does n't it?

XXXI

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Pen-y-gwrd-Hotel
August 30th

Dear Rose-Without-a-Thorn: I did n't find the amber, but Sir Lionel found a fat little, round lump, and gave it to me; and that seems almost more lucky than finding it myself; because it may mean that something good is to come to me from him.

He was on the Aberystwith beach when I got there, though it was only half-past six. He had n't said a word the night before, but he made up his mind then to find some amber — for me. You see, he knew the superstition about luck, and how everybody goes hunting for it.

I picked up a pretty piece of carnelian, and gave it to him in exchange, asking him "to keep it to remember me by."

"I don't want to remember you," he answered. And when, perhaps, I looked hurt, he went on: "Because I want to keep you in my life. I want you very much, if ——"

But just then Mrs. Senter came behind us, and left that "if" like a key sticking in a door which could n't be opened without one more turn. I should have liked to

know what was behind the door; but I daresay there was nothing much, really.

She, too, had come to look for amber and other things. I don't know about the other things, but she did n't find the amber.

At eleven o'clock, after seeing something of the place, we slipped away toward Machynlleth, along a hilly road, which grew lovelier with each of its many twists among low mountains. Now, said Sir Lionel, we were about to see the heart of Wales; and I should soon have realized that without his telling, for as we slowed down to pass through little villages we heard the children talking Welsh — a soft, pleasant language, which I can only try to describe by saying that it sounded like whispering out loud. But that is a very Irish description!

The scenery was so gentle in its beauty that my wild, excited mood was lulled by its soft influence. The colour of landscape and sky kept the delicate tints of spring, though we are in full, rich summer; and there was none of the tropical verdure we saw near Tenby; no crimson fountains of fuchsias, no billows of blood-red roses, and fierce southern flowers. Pale honeysuckle draped the gray or whitewashed stone cottages. Rocks and crannies of walls were daintily fringed with ferns, or cushioned with the velvet of moss, and crusted with tarnished golden lichen. A modern-timbered house, rising pertly here and there, looked out of place among dwellings whose early owners quarried each stone from among their own mountains.

As we left the fairy glades of those wooded hills for

rugged mountains scantily clad with ragged grass, slate-quarries tried their ugly best to blotch and spoil the scene, but owing to some strange charm of atmosphere, like a gauze veil on the stage, they could not quite succeed. By and by the gauze veil turned to rain, but rain suited the wild landscape — far better, by the way, than it suited Mrs. Senter, whose nightly hair-wavers are but a reed to lean upon in wet weather. She made some excuse to come behind with Emily and me, and before the car started again I summoned courage to ask if I might take her place, saying I loved to feel the rain.

So there I was with Sir Lionel once more; and I wondered if he thought of that night when we rushed through the storm from Tintagel to Clovelly? Soon this also bade fair to be a storm, for the rain began to tumble out of the sky, rather than fall, as if an army of people stood throwing down water by the bucketful. I revelled in it, and in the sombre scenery, where sharp rocks stood out like bones through the tattered green coats of soldier-mountains. All the world was gray or gray-green, save for a patch of purple heather here and there, like the stain of a new wound.

We were under Cadir Idris, mounting the pass high above a deep ravine; yet the blowing rain hid the mountain from our eyes as if he were the veiled prophet. The sound of the wind, which seemed to come from all quarters at once, was like the mysterious music of a great Æolian harp, as it mingled with the song of ghostly cascades that veined the dark rocks with marble. Mountain sheep sprang from crag to crag as Apollo

rounded a corner and broke into their tranquil lives, now and then loosening a stone as they jumped. One good-sized rock would have bounced down on the roof of our car if Sir Lionel had n't seen it coming, and put on such a spurt of speed that Apollo leaped ahead of the danger. But he always does see things in time. You would n't think sheep could have as much expression as those sheep had, when they saw us and were n't sure which way to run. Of course they need n't have run at all; but whichever way they decided, it was certain to be wrong!

I was sorry to leave that pass behind, and have its door shut after us, for we came out into a pastoral landscape, where the only wild things were the grazing black cattle. It was charming country, though; and in less than a mile we had reached a famous spot known as the Tourist Walk. The rain was pelting down harder than ever, so we could not get out and take the walk; but soon after we had abandoned it the deluge suddenly turned from lead to a thick spray of diamonds, mixed with sparkling gold-dust. Our road glittered ahead of us like a wide silver ribbon unrolled, as we sailed into the little gray town of Dolgelly on its torrent river; and beyond, in a fresh-washed radiance of sunlight, the way was one long enchantment, the sweet world of green hills and musical waters looking as young as if God had made it that day. The graceful mountains which pressed round the valley had the air of waiting each her turn to stoop and drink a life-giving draught from the river, which, as we neared Barmouth, opened to the sea, gleaming like a vast sheet of quicksilver. Further on, travelling

" The splendid ruin, reared on its great rock "

through woods where young green trees shot up from gilded rocks, glimpses of the estuary came to us like a vision of some Italian lake.

Just before Harlech, the wild yet nymphlike beauty of the world changed to an almost startling grandeur, for the coast moved back from the sea with a noble sweep, magnificent mountains towered along the shore, and line after line of beryl waves shattered into pearl upon a beach of darkened gold.

Harlech Castle was an event in my life. I thought I had begun to take ruined castles for granted in Wales, as you do sea-shells on the shore; but Harlech is a castle that you could n't take for granted. It was a shock at first to find that a hotel had been built in the very face of it, as if bearding it in its den; yet it is a nice hotel; and when we had lunched there agreeably, I not only forgave it for existing, but began to like and thank it for having thoughtfully placed itself on that admirable height.

From here our eyes ought to have been smitten with the sight of Snowdon; but the Grand Old Mountain was asleep, his head buried in white cloud-pillows which alone betrayed his whereabouts; so we had to be content with the castle. And I was content. To see the splendid ruin reared on its great rock, dark against sea and sky, was thrilling as a vision of an old wounded knight girding his strength for a last stand.

History says that Harlech Castle is no older than Edward I.; but story says (which is more important, because more romantic) that in the dim dawn while

History still dozed, here rose the Tower of Twr Brauwen, white-bosomed sister of Bran the Blessed. Also, it came into the possession of Hawis Gadern, a great beauty and heiress, whose uncles tried to wrest it from her, but were defeated and imprisoned in the castle. Anyway, however that may be, Owen Glendower came and conquered, in the beginning of the fifteenth century, when he was forging a chain of wonderful deeds which made him the hero of Wales. Never mind if he was driven away a few years after by Prince Henry. That 's another story.

The way from Harlech by Portmadoc to exquisite Pont Aberglaslyn and Beddgelert is very Arthurian; that is, it suggests pre-mediæval backgrounds, and at every turn I caught myself expecting to come upon Camelot, unspoiled, unchanged. The high mountains still wore their invisibility masks, but the lower mountains, not too proud to show themselves to motoring mortals, grouped as graciously together as if they were lovely ladies and gay knights, turned to stone just when they had assembled to tread a minuet. And the fair Glaslyn flowed past their feet with a swing and sweep, as though the crystal flood kept time to dance music which our ears were not attuned to catch.

Quickly we flashed by more than one beautiful lake, too; a jewel hidden among mountains, found by our eyes unexpectedly, only to be lost again. And all the while Cader Idris and Snowdon drew hoods of mist over their heads, pulling them down tightly and firmly. Not once had we caught a glimpse of either mountain,

though we were almost near enough to knock our noses or Apollo's bonnet against their sharp elbows; but we were too happy to care much — at least, one of us was! — and we cared even less when rain came on again. I still kept my place beside Sir Lionel, who was repentant for having made me cry over the dreadful, agonizing, too-tragic story of Gelert. I won't repeat it to you, because it 's wickedly sad, and grayhound Gelert was so much nobler than most people.

Sheets of spun glass shimmered and waved before us, as we rushed on through the mountains, past the beautiful place of Gelert's grave, up toward Pen-y-gwrd. And the tinkling swish of the rain on the glass sounded to me as the Welsh names had begun to sound. I wish you could hear them spoken, for the spelling gives no idea of their pronunciation, or the pleasant, muffled music of them. But all I can tell you is, that when you come into Wales you will feel they are characteristic of the country; mysterious, sympathetic, rather secretive.

Sir Lionel was happy in the thought of Pen-y-gwrd, because some of the best memories of his boyhood are associated with that little spot in the mountainland of Wales. He used to come, and climb with an old friend a few years older than himself, a Colonel O'Hagan, who is in Bengal now, and who — he thinks — will like me. Not much chance of our ever meeting!

Just as Sir Lionel finished quoting Charles Kingsley on Pen-y-gwrd, we drew up in front of a low gray stone building; and Kingsley's merry words rang in my ears

as the door of the hotel opened. You know I can always remember a verse after having once heard it.

"There is no Inn in Snowden which is not awful dear,
Excepting Pen-y-gwrd (you can't pronounce it, dear)
Which standeth in the meeting of noble valleys three;
One is the Vale of Gwynant, so well beloved by me;
One goes to Capel Curig, and I can't mind its name;
And one, it is Llanberis Pass, which all men knew the same."

Never did any gesture give a better welcome than the opening of that door! We 'd been too happy to know we were cold with the chill of the mountains — half-seen shapes that hovered close, with white cascades like ghosts flitting ever across their dimness; but when a glow of firelight streamed out to greet us, suddenly we realized that we were shivering.

In the square hall, several men were talking together, men with Oxford voices and open-air faces. In their midst was one man, much older, grizzled and weather-beaten, not a gentleman in the conventional sense, yet in listening to him the others had an air of deference, as if he were a hero to the group. The four or five figures stood out like a virile, impressionist sketch in black and brown on a red background; but as we entered, welcomed by some pink-cheeked young hostess, the ruddy light danced into our eyes. The men in front of the fire moved a little as if to give place, and glances were thrown at us, while for an instant the conversation flagged. Then the group was about to return to its own interests, when suddenly, out from among the rest stepped the grizzled man. He hesitated, as if uncertain whether or no to obey an impulse, then came forward with a modest yet eager air.

"I can't be mistaken, sir, can I? he asked. "It must be Mr. Pendragon — I beg your pardon, Sir Li ——"

"Why, Penrhyn!" cried Sir Lionel, not giving him time to finish; and seizing one of the gnarled brown hands, he shook it as if he never meant to stop. Both their faces had lighted up, and were beaming with joy. The grizzled man seemed to have thrown off fifteen years in a minute, and Sir Lionel looked like a boy of twenty-two. By this time everyone was gazing — staring is too rude a word — and the other faces were beaming as well, as if the most delightful thing had happened. I am sure that Sir Lionel had forgotten the existence of us three females, and had rushed back to the bright dawn of his youth. It was the light of that dawn I saw on his face; and I found my heart beating with excitement, though I did n't know why, or what it was all about.

"By Jove, Penrhyn, to think of your being the first man to greet me on our old stamping-ground!" Sir Lionel exclaimed. "It seems too good to be true. I 've been thinking about you all day, and your face is a sight for sore eyes."

"I 'd rather see you, sir, than have a thousand pounds drop down on me through the ceiling," retorted the mysterious hero. (I should think so, indeed.)

They shook hands, and beamed on each other a little more, and then Sir Lionel remembered his flock. Turning to us, he introduced the grizzled man.

"This is my old friend and guide, Owen Penrhyn," said he, as if he were drawing us into the circle of a prince. "There never was a guide like him in the Welsh mountains,

and never will be again. Jove! it 's glorious to find him at the old business still! Though, in our day together, we did n't carry this, eh?"

Then I saw that an Alpine rope was coiled across one of the strong shoulders clad in rough tweed, and that the great stout boots were strikingly trimmed with huge bright nails.

"It 's like Sir Lionel to put the praise on me," protested the dear old thing, flushing up like a boy. "Why, he was the best amateur" (he pronounced the word quaintly and I loved him for it) "I ever see, or ever expect to see. If he 'd gone on as he began, he 'd a' broken the noses of some of us guides. Pity he had to go to furrin' parts! And I 'll be bound he never told you, ladies, of his first ascent of Twll Ddu, or how he pulled me up out of the torrent by sheer strength, when my fingers were that cold I could n't grip the hand-holds? I 'd 'a' fallen clear to the bottom of the Devil's Kitchen if 't had n't been for Mr. Pendragon, as he was then. And what d' you think, ladies, he says, when I accused him o' savin' my life?"

"What?" I begged to know, forgetting to give my elders a chance to speak first.

"'Tommy rot.' That 's his very words. I 've never forgot 'em. 'Tommy rot.'"

He beamed on us, and every one in the hall laughed, except perhaps Emily, who smiled doubtfully, not sure whether or no it was to her brother's credit to have remarked "Tommy rot" in such a crisis. But after that, we were all friends, we, and Owen Penrhyn, and the other men, too; for though we did n't

really talk to them till dinner, I knew by their eyes that they admired Sir Lionel immensely, and wanted to know us all.

At dinner there was splendid climbing talk, and we heard further tales of Sir Lionel's prowess; among others of a great jump he had made from one rock of Trifaen to the other, with only a little square of rock to light upon, just on the edge of a sheer precipice; a record feat, according to the old guide. And while the men and we women listened, the wind outside raged so wildly that now and then it seemed as if a giant fell against the house and afterward dashed pebbles against it in his fury. Then again the wind-giant would rush by the hotel in his hundred-horse-power motor-car, tooting his horn as he went. It was nice sitting there in the comfortable dining-room, listening to the climbing stories, while the wind roared and could n't get at us, and the whole valley was full of marching rain!

Now I am writing in my bedroom, close to a gossipy little fire, which is a delightful companion, although August has still a day to run. Mrs. Senter is having her beauty sleep, I suppose; and I should think Mrs. Norton is reading Young's "Night Thoughts." I know she takes the book about with her. The men are still in the hall downstairs, very happy, if one can judge by the laughter that breaks out often; and I am as happy as I can be with the thought of Dick probably appearing at Chester day after to-morrow night. But I won't let myself think of that too much, because it is n't certain that he will get back then, and it *is* certain that there will be some word from you, which may change

everything. You see what faith your girl has in you! But would n't she be ungrateful if she had n't?

There is one other thing which has been bothering me in odd moments, though, and I wish I had asked your advice about that, too, in the letter to be answered at Chester; but the idea had n't occurred to me then. It suddenly sprang into my mind last night when I was lying in bed, not able to go to sleep.

Ought I to repeat to Ellaline what Mrs. Senter told me about the money? I don't mean the part about the poor child's father and mother. No one but a thorough Pig of the Universe would tell a daughter perfectly unnecessary horrors, like those; but about her not being an heiress in her own right, and depending on Sir Lionel for everything except two hundred a year?

If I were really in her place, instead of pretending to be, I should want to know, and should n't thank anyone for keeping the truth from me. It would be unbearable to accept generosity from a man, thinking I might be as extravagant as I liked, with my own money. But it is difficult to make up my mind, on account of the *fiancé*. You, being French yourself, know how it is with French officers who fall in love with a girl who has no *dot*, or only a small one. Most of them, if poor themselves, would slap their foreheads and despair, but think it their duty to their country to forget the girl.

I 'm afraid the adorable Honoré is rather poor; and though no normal young man, especially a Frenchman, could help being fascinated by Ellaline if thrown in her society, many normal young men would be more ready to let themselves go, believing her to be an heiress. Per-

haps Honoré would n't have proposed if he had n't thought Ellaline a very rich as well as a very pretty girl. Perhaps if he found out even now, at the eleventh hour, that she depends upon a person whom she has just slighted and deceived, he might desert her.

Would n't that be awful? Not that I think Ellaline would tell him, if I wrote to her exactly what I 've heard from Mrs. Senter. Fascinating as she is, it is n't in her to be frank. I 'm sure she would keep the secret until after her lover was safely her husband; but she would be upset and even more anxious about the future than she is.

I don't know what to do. And in the last letter I had from her she scolded me for continually praising Sir Lionel. She is sure I am mistaken about him, and that, if I can see any good under the dragon's scales the evil monster must have hypnotized me. She really seemed quite vexed. Maybe I shall hear from her at Chester. I hope so, as I 'm rather worried because she did n't write to the last address I was able to give.

Whatever message your expected letter or telegram has for me, I will answer it at once.

Good night, dearest little Dame Wisdom, with more love than ever from

Your

AUDRIE.

I 'm so glad we are staying here all day to-morrow and to-morrow night. There are dozens of beautiful things to see; and besides, it is as safe as the inmost circle of a labyrinth from Dick, who has no clue.

XXXII

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Queen's Hotel, Chester
September 1st

We 've been in Chester for several hours, my Angel; and not only is there no Dick (for which heaven be praised), but no word from you, which worries me. Still, I shan't be really anxious unless on my second call at the post-office (to be made by and by) I draw a blank again. At least, I did n't draw a blank exactly when I went there before. I drew a letter from Ellaline, with vexing news. Honoré de Guesclin is in a scrape. He could get leave now, and come to her, but he and some of his brother officers have been amusing themselves by learning to play bridge. Naturally, those who played best came off best, and Honoré was n't one of them. He has borrowed of a money-lender, and is in a hole, because the fellow won't let him have more, and is bothering for a settlement. Also, Honoré owes some of his friends, and has n't a penny to pay up or start on a journey. Ellaline does n't seem to think much about the moral aspect of her Honoré's affairs (you see, she knows nothing of what her mother must have suffered from her father's *penchant*), but she is in a great state of nerves about the delay. She has always been told it

was bad luck to put off a wedding, and besides, she finds Scotland *triste*, and wants to be married.

You can guess to what all this is leading up! I must get money, somehow, anyhow, but a great deal, and immediately. I must send her at least four thousand francs by return of post; five thousand, if possible; but if "Monsieur le Dragon is too stingy to give more, at all events nothing less will be of the least use."

It 's easy for her to dictate terms. She has n't got to face the very upright and honourable gentleman whom she calls the Dragon, whereas I have; and I 've already shamed myself by asking for large sums at short intervals. I simply can't go to him here and "hold him up" for four thousand francs. It would be monstrous, and if he asked what I wanted to do with it (as it seems to me it would be only his duty to ask the young schoolgirl he thinks me) I should be able to find no decent excuse, as I have no expenses beyond those he pays. However, I shall have to do something desperate, I don't know yet what. He has given me some pretty things, and though I hate the thought of parting with them in such a way, as they 're Ellaline's by rights, it 's no more than fair she should benefit by them in the hour of her need. Poor girl! Of course there 's nothing for it but she must marry the young man now, yet it seems a poor outlook, does n't it?

She explains in a P. S. that she was too upset to write me to the last place, as she had n't heard from Honoré when she expected; but now, if the money is forthcoming all right he will start for Scotland as soon as possible after receiving it from her, and settling up.

I have calculated times as well as I could, and fancy that if I can in any way send her a post-office order from Chester to-morrow, she and Honoré may be able to marry in a week. Once I should n't have believed I could be sorry to have my "principal" arrive and take back her own part; but now, if it were n't for Dick Burden, it would actually be a temptation to me to delay Ellaline's appearance on the scene. Of course, I would n't be such a wicked wretch as to yield to the temptation, but I should feel it.

Ellaline promises to telegraph the moment Honoré arrives, and again when they 're safely married, so as to give the understudy plenty of time to scuttle off the stage, before the guardian is informed that his charge has been taken off his hands. She does n't want to see Sir Lionel, she says, but she and Honoré will write him unless, when Honoré has consulted a Scottish solicitor (if that 's what they 're called), it 's considered wiser for the lawyer himself to write. So you see, this makes it harder for me to know what to do about repeating Mrs. Senter's story. If Ellaline understood her position she would, perhaps, think it better to come with her bridegroom and throw herself at her injured guardian's feet.

What a nice world this would be if your affairs did n't get so hopelessly tangled up with other people's that you can hardly call your conscience your own! And never have I realized the niceness of the world more fully than in the last few days.

Yesterday I had a little easy climb with Sir Lionel and the old guide, and saw the glory of Llanberis Pass. To-day, on the wings of Apollo, we have flown through

"Its twenty-one towers and turrets still dominate bridge and river"

amazingly interesting country. It really did seem like flying, because the road surface was so like velvet stretched over elastic steel that eyesight alone told us we touched earth.

Miles are n't tyrants any more, but slaves to the mastery of good motor-cars; and any motoring Monte Cristo can fairly exclaim, "The world is mine!" (N. B. This is n't original. Sir Lionel said it at lunch.) From North Wales to Cheshire looks a long run on the map, but motors are made to live down maps; and we arrived in this astonishingly perfect old town early in the afternoon, coming by way of Capel Curig (whence we saw Snowdon crowned with a double rainbow), sweet Bettws-y-coed, or "station in the wood," and so down the river valley in a bird swoop, to noble Conway, with its castle that was once a famous Welsh fortress. Now, in piping days of peace, its towers and turrets still dominate bridge and river, and the great pile is as fine, in its way, as Carcassone. Don't you remember, it was from Conway Castle that Richard the Second started out to meet Bolingbroke?

We stopped to take photographs and buy a few small pearls from the "pearl-breeding river"; and while we gazed our fill at the mighty monument, we learned from a guardian that in old days a certain Lady Erskine hired the castle for six shillings and eightpence a year, in addition to a "dish of fish for the Queen," when her majesty chanced to pass!

At Colwyn Bay we lunched early, at a charming hotel in a garden above a sea of Mediterranean blue; and the red-roofed town along the shore reminded me

of Dinard. After that, coming by Abergele and Rhuddlan to Chester, the way was no longer through a region of romance and untouched beauty. There were quarries, which politely though firmly announced their hours of blasting, and road users accommodated themselves to the rules as best they might. But there were castles on the heights, as well as quarries in the depths; and though Sir Lionel says that inhabitants of Wales never think of turning to look at such a "common object of the seashore" as a mere castle, I have n't come to that state of mind yet.

Near Rhuddlan there was a tremendous battle at the end of the seventh century, out of which so many fine songs have been made that the Welsh princes and nobles who were slain have never lost their glory. There 's a castle, too (of course), but the best thing that happened for us was a gloriously straight road like a road of France, and as nobody was on it save ourselves at that moment, we did about six miles before the next moment, when others might claim a share. I believe the Holyhead road is very celebrated.

Soon we had to turn our backs upon a mystic mountain-land that ringed us in, and face the sea once more — a wide water-horizon whose line was broken with great ships steaming from all parts of the world to Liverpool.

Apollo had seemed a little faint before luncheon, because of some inner disturbance, but he was flying fast as a saint on his way to Paradise as we crossed the Dee, into England out of Wales, and sprang into Gladstone country.

When people are obliged to reach a town by rail, there

must be disappointments to lovers of the picturesque, as you and I know by experience. It 's like arriving at a house by the tradesmen's entrance; but with a motor one sails up to the front door through the park.

Of all the towns to which Apollo has brought us, the entrance to Chester to-day was the best. The first effect of colour left on my eyes the impression of sunset-red, warm as copper beeches. The place seemed to be lit with fading firelight, and I wondered at the soft glow everywhere, until I realized that the big buildings — the Cathedral, the great houses and the old city wall — were all made of rosy sandstone.

You can't imagine how a large town which has lived as long as Chester has, and gone on growing, could have contrived to remain so satisfyingly beautiful, or keep such an air of old-time completeness. But the secret is, I suppose, that Chester is "canny" as well as "bonny," and, being wise, she refused to throw away her precious antique garments for glaring new ones. When she had to add houses, or even shops, wherever possible she reproduced the charm and quaintness of the black and white Tudor or Stuart buildings which are Chester's intimate treasures.

Of course, I 've seen little of the place yet; but after I had been to the post-office, I strolled about before coming back to the hotel, partly to recover from my disappointment in not hearing from you, partly because I was so bewitched with my first glimpse that I could n't bear to come indoors still a stranger to the town. Hovering in front of the Cathedral (a curious building, black in its oldest parts, bright pink where it has been renovated) I saw Sir Lionel

and Mrs. Norton coming. That was awkward, because I had said I wanted to "settle in" before sight-seeing, but I explained vaguely that I 'd changed my mind, and was invited to go into the Cathedral with them. Perhaps it was because Emily was with us that nothing seemed very wonderful in the interior — unless the carved oak in the choir — but the cloisters are beautiful, and I liked the chapter house.

After "doing" the Cathedral, Mrs. Norton was tired, so Sir Lionel and I had a walk alone, an adventure Mrs. Senter would never have allowed if she 'd guessed I was out of my room. She is a dog in the manger about walks. She hates them herself, but she won't let other people take them without her if she can help it.

We dropped Emily at the hotel, and had a delicious ramble (speaking for myself!) through the four extraordinary streets which stand for much in Chester's peculiar fame. Wandering there, it was easy to believe what the guide-books say: that nowhere in Great Britain does a town exist which so preserves the ancient character of all its architecture. I don't know if there are British relics; but the city wall and gates are Roman, part of the castle, too; and since mediæval days nothing seems to have lost in picturesqueness. People come from all over the world to see the Rows: streets dug out below the rock-surface on which the town was originally built, having shops and even warehouses on their level, with galleries above, open fronted, stone-paved, balustraded with black oak, so that these "Rows" all look as if the houses were wide open, communicating with one another. The carved oak fronts of the houses and shops, done ingeniously with

strange pargetting, and adorned with wondrous windows, are so adorably queer, with their stagey effects, that I don't wonder Chester has become a kind of Mecca for travellers from my native land, where most things are new.

When we had thus skimmed a little of the cream from the town itself, we had a walk on the old wall, while church bells, near and distant, chimed; but still I don't feel I 've more than glanced at the place. To-morrow we plan to run out to Knutsford, which is Mrs. Gaskell's Cranford really, and I have begged to start early, because if we do (though naturally I don't allege this reason) we can get off before Dick arrives. Then, when we come back, we can do more sight-seeing, and maybe be out when he turns up at the hotel. After that event, unless you save me to-night with some miraculous suggestion, all pleasure will be over. And at best, I 'm not looking forward with undiluted joy to to-morrow, because I must not only decide what to do for Ellaline, but do it.

While I was walking on the wall with Sir Lionel just now, gazing up at watch-towers, or down over the town, and dodging seedy amateur guides whom we nicknamed "Wallers," I kept thinking, thinking, about what to sell. The only thing Sir Lionel has given me of really great value, which could be easily disposed of, is the ruby and diamond ring. But how it would hurt me to give it up in such a sordid way! It was my birthday present from him, and it 's associated in my mind with that night of moonlight in the New Forest when I first knew I *cared*. But I 'm sorely afraid it must be the thing to go. There are several important-looking antique shops here, and I noticed, when casting my eye about, one where they make

a speciality of curious and rare jewellery. I shall look at it again more carefully when I run out to the post-office, in a few minutes, and perhaps I may have courage to try and strike a bargain, so as to send the money off in the morning before Knutsford — if I get it ——

An hour later.

Dearest, I 've got your wire, now, having retrieved it from the Poste Restante, and I 'm thankful for it — thankful that you 're well, thankful that you don't blame me for anything I 've done, faults committed or mistakes made. But — alas, I don't think the advice, good as it is, will be of any use to me. You see, you don't know Mrs. Senter. It would be hopeless for me to try and force her to exert authority over Dick Burden.

In the first place, she has no real authority, as apparently he has no expectations from her; and in the second place, though I 'm almost sure she does n't know the truth about me and Ellaline, she suspects that Dick has a hold over me; and after all I 've submitted to from him already it would be impossible to "bluff" her into the belief that I 'd dare ask Sir Lionel to send them both away. No, my dear one, there 's little hope for me in that scheme. I allowed Ellaline to make my bed for me, and I must lie in it, although it has proved to be one of those nasty folding ones that will shut and swallow me up in a trap.

No, it 's cowardly to whine like that. It won't be pleasant to keep my promise to Dick; but there have been worse things; and I shall probably be able to escape before long. Anyhow it will all be the same a

hundred years hence. As soon as I am with you again it will be as if nothing had happened; and meanwhile I am going to keep a "stiff upper lip." It may n't be becoming, but that won't matter, as Sir Lionel will never look at me; and you will see by my letters in future how well I am getting on.

Best love to my best loved,

From

AUDRIE.

XXXIII

SIR LIONEL PENDRAGON TO COLONEL PATRICK O'HAGAN

Keswick Hotel, September 3rd

My Dear Pat: Here we are, you see, in the "happy hunting ground" where you and I used to hunt such shy game as chimneys, needles, crevices, etc., etc.; and if I 'm not as happy in it now as I ought to be, that is n't the fault of the country, which is as fair as it ever was — the fairest in England, perhaps.

It just happens, unfortunately, that I 've been rubbed up the wrong way before coming to the places I 'd looked forward to revisiting more than any other, except Cornwall; and if I had n't invited dear old Penrhyn from Pen-y-gwrd to meet me here, and have a climb, I 'm not sure I should have stopped. However, I have enjoyed the beauty of the run. I must have been as blind as a mole, and as earthy, if I had n't.

Fine road from Chester to Liverpool, which city had an air of opulent magnificence seen from the ferry, as we neared her — rather like a huge, modern Venice. Lunched there, at the Adelphi, on the fat of the land, and had some trouble finding the way out of town. Liverpool welcomes the coming, but does n't speed the parting guest; not a sign-post in sight anywhere. Bad

pavé till Ormskirk, when things improved, growing better and better; but no scenery to speak of until near Preston. Villages all along the line, stone-paved; struck me as being characteristic of that stern North Country which we approached. "Road too good not to mean police-traps," said I to myself; and an A. A. scout warned me that they swarmed; but luckily we were not held up. I was n't in a temper to have taken any nonsense lying down, I 'm afraid.

Ran straight through Lancaster, which was almost a pity, as John o' Gaunt's Castle is a brave old fortress, whether or no he really built the famous tower; and at the King's Arms we might have got some genuine oat-cakes, which would have given a taste of Cumberland to the strangers. As it was, the first truly characteristic things we came upon were the stout stone walls, on which we happened a little short of Kendal. Down to Windermere, a steep but beautiful run; Mrs. Senter by my side, and very enthusiastic. She seems to take an unaffected interest in scenery, with which you would hardly have credited her in old times. She was entranced by her first sight of the lake, which is not surprising, for to one who has never seen them the lakes must be a revelation.

Dick Burden, by the way, was not with us on this run, nor was he at Chester. He had business in London, which kept him longer than he expected when he left our party at Tintern. I can't say I regret him, though others may. I understand that there has been some telegraphing between him and his aunt, and that his present intention is to rejoin us at Newcastle. Rather

wish he would put off his return a little longer, as it is arranged that we go out to Cragside and Bamborough Castle; and one does n't like to abuse such delightful hospitality as we have been offered there. Dick's presence does not add to the gaiety of nations, it seems to me, and I am not keen on taking him.

I found Penrhyn waiting for me here, the good fellow, delighted at the prospect of his short visit, and to-morrow he and I will have some small climb. I shall send the car, with Young Nick to drive all who care to go, to a few of the beauty spots, while I am otherwise occupied. They must penetrate the cloistered charms of exquisite Borrodaile, and of course see Lodore, which ought to be at its best now, as there have been heavy rains. Jove! How the Cumberland names ring on the ear, like the "horns of elfland"! Helvelyn; Rydal; Ennerdale; Derwent Water; Glaramara! Are n't they all as crystal as the depths of mountain tarns, or that amethystine colour of the sky behind the clear profiles of high peaks?

I 'm sorry we 're too late for the Grasmere Sports; but the fact is we have lingered by the way longer than I planned for this trip; and now, as things are turning out I 'm inclined to cut the end of the tour short. Graylees is practically ready for occupation, and I feel as if I ought to be there.

No! That is n't good enough for you, old chap. It 's true, as far as it goes; but you have begun to read between the lines by this time, I know, and I may as well speak out. I should be an ostrich if I were n't sure that you 've been saying to yourself: "Why does n't this fellow refer to the girl he has spent so much pen and

paper on? Why does he go out of his way to avoid mentioning her name?"

Well, she has n't eloped, or done anything culpable. But there is no use concealing from you, as I have told you so much, that she has hurt me to the quick. Not that she has been unkind, or rude, or disagreeable. Quite the contrary. And that 's the worst of it, for I prayed to heaven that there might be nothing of her mother in this young soul. At first, as you know, I could hardly believe the girl to be all she seemed, but soon she won me to thinking her perfection — a lily, grown by some miracle of Nature in a soil where weeds had flourished hitherto. I would have given my right hand rather than have to admit a flaw in her — that is, the one fatal flaw: slyness hidden under apparent frankness, which means an inherited tendency to deceit.

This may sound as if I had found the poor child out in a lie. But there has been no spoken lie. She has only done the sort of thing I might have expected Ellaline de Nesville's daughter to do.

I told you about the ring I bought her at Winchester, and gave her on her birthday; how prettily she received it; how she seemed to treasure it more because of the thought and the association than the intrinsic value of the ruby and the brilliants.

At Chester, the night before we left, I thought I 'd try to pick up some little souvenir of the town for her, as she was delighted with the place. Of course I wanted something small, as our luggage is n't of the expanding order, so I had the idea of jewellery; a little antique pendant, or a few old paste buttons. There is a certain

shop in the "Rows" where one looks for such things, and expects to find them good, if highly priced. In the window of that shop I saw displayed for sale the ring I had given to Ellaline!

The sight of it there was a blow; but I persuaded myself I might be mistaken; that it was n't the same ring, but another, almost a duplicate. I went in and asked to look at it. The shopman mentioned that it was something quite unusually good, and had "only come in" that afternoon. Inside I found the date which I had had engraved on the ring; the date of Ellaline's birthday. I bought it back — for a good deal more than I paid in Winchester, as this chap knew his business thoroughly; but that is a detail. It was merely to satisfy a kind of sentimental vanity that I wanted to get the thing out of the window and into my own hands; for, needless to say, I don't intend to speak of the matter at all to Ellaline. It would humiliate me more than it would her, to let her see that I know what she did with her birthday present; for partly, I blame myself. I supposed that I was fairly free-handed with money, and had no idea that the girl could possibly want more than she had. Still, I told her to let me know in case she found me thoughtless, and not to hesitate to ask for anything she wanted. She could have had as much as she chose, and I would have put no questions. If I 'd been surprised with the largeness of the sums, I should have believed that she had some pensioners to whom she wished to be charitable; for I had begun to believe that she could do no wrong.

As I said, there was nothing culpable in selling the ring. It was hers. She had a right to do as she liked with it.

But that she should like to part with it; that she should do so, knowing I would hate it if I knew; that she should be exactly the same with me as if she had n't done a thing which she was aware would distress me; that she had n't the courage and frankness to come to me and say ——

Oh, hang it all, I 'm grumbling and complaining like an old prig! Perhaps I am one. I know Dick Burden thinks so. We 'll let it go at that. I don't need to explain to you a matter which outwardly is insignificant, and is significant to me only for reasons which the past will account for to you better than my explanations.

The salt has gone out of life a bit, and I think it will do me good to get to Graylees, where I shall find a thousand things to interest me. I daresay Ellaline will be glad to settle down, though she is too polite to show it; and I 'm sure Emily will.

After a look at the Roman Wall, and a sight of Bamborough, we shall run to Warwickshire with few détours or pauses.

You see, by the way, that you were wrong in thinking she could care. If there had been the least warmth in her heart for me she could n't have sold my ring. I 'm glad I did n't make a fool of myself.

Penrhyn wants to be remembered to you.

Yours ever,

PEN.

XXXIV

SIR LIONEL PENDRAGON TO COLONEL O'HAGAN

County Hotel, Newcastle

September 5th

My Dear Pat: You 'll be surprised to get another letter from me on the tail of the last, but there have been developments in which I think you will be interested.

The sale of the ring was a mere preface to what has followed.

We arrived at Newcastle this afternoon, finding Burden already here. I did n't think the meeting between him and Ellaline particularly cordial, but appearances are deceiving where girls are concerned, as I have lately been reminded in more ways than one. About an hour ago, while I was getting off some letters and telegrams, I received a message from my ward asking if she could see me in the hotel drawing-room — the place is so full I could n't get a private one.

I went down at once, of course, dimly (and foolishly) hoping that she wanted to "confess" about the ring. But it was quite a different confession she had to make; her desire to be engaged to Mr. Burden!

Naturally, after our last conversation on that subject, I was somewhat surprised, and on the spur of the moment was tempted to remind her that not long ago Young Nick

had appeared as suitable in her eyes, as young Dick. However, I stopped in time to save myself from being both bounder and brute. I did inquire whether she were now sure of her own mind; but it was the duty of a guardian and not the malice of a disappointed man which prompted the question.

Her manner was singularly dry and businesslike, and she came as near to looking plain as it is possible for a beautiful girl to come; so love is n't always a beautifier.

"I am sure of my mind for the moment," she replied, with repulsive prudence. "I suppose a girl need never say more."

This answer and her manner puzzled me, so I ventured to ask, in a guardianly way, if she thought she were enough in love with Burden to be happy with him.

"I have n't to think about being with him at all yet," she temporized.

"You seem to have an extraordinary idea of an engagement," I said, perhaps rather sneeringly, for I felt bitter, and had never approved of her less.

"Perhaps I have," she returned, in such an odd, muffled sort of tone that I feared she was going to cry, and glanced at her sharply. But she was looking down and there were no tears visible, so that fear was relieved.

"You do, at all events, wish to be engaged to Burden?" I persisted. "Am I to understand that?"

"I have asked for your consent," she said, with a queer stiffness. And it was on my tongue to say as stiffly, "Very well; you have it. What pleases me should please you." But the words stuck in my throat, as if they 'd been lumps of ice; and instead I answered, almost

in spite of myself, that I could n't give my consent unconditionally. I must have another talk with Burden, and whatever my decision might be, I would prefer that she did n't consider herself engaged until after the tour was ended.

"We 'll bring it to a close as soon as possible now," I added, trying not to sound as bitter as I felt, "so as not to keep you waiting."

She made no response to this, except to give me a singular look which even now I find it impossible to understand. It was as if she had something to reproach me for, and yet as if she were more pleased than sad.

Girls are very complicated human beings, if indeed they can be classified thus — though perhaps some men's lives would be duller if they were simpler. As for my life, the less girls have to do with it when my ward is off my hands, the better.

Since the above conversation, I have been drawn into a talk with Burden. He appeared anxious to find out exactly what had passed between Ellaline and me, almost as if he suspected her of not "playing straight," but I replied, briefly, that she had asked my permission to be engaged to him, having evidently changed her mind since our last discussion on the subject. This appeared to content him more or less, although I repeated what I 'd said to the girl: that I was not prepared to consent officially until I had communicated with his mother, and satisfied myself that my ward would be welcomed in the family. This he evidently thought old-fashioned and over-scrupulous, but when I admitted being both, he ceased to protest, only saying that he wished to write

to his mother first. I suggested talking with his aunt, also, and he did not object to the idea, so Mrs. Senter and I have already had a short conversation concerning her nephew's love affair. She cried a little, and said that she would be "horribly alone in the world" when her "only real pal" was married, but that of course she wished for his happiness above everything, and she meant to give him a wedding present worth having, if she beggared herself for years. The poor little woman showed a great deal of heart, and I was touched. I 'm afraid she 's not too happy, under her air of almost flippant gaiety and "smartness," for she rather hinted that she liked some man who did n't care for her — someone she met in the East. I suppose she can't be cherishing a hidden passion for you? Rather cruel of us, accusing her of being a flirt in those days, if she were in earnest all the time, eh?

In case I "pump" her a little about this mysterious disappointment, and find it 's you she 's thinking of, I may turn the tables, and give you some good advice — better than you gave me. You might do worse than get leave and have another look at this pretty and agreeable lady before deciding to let her slip.

Yours always,

PEN.

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Good old Owen enjoyed his two days in Cumberland. He, too, tried his hand on advising me. Said I ought to marry. Not I!

XXXV

MRS. SENTER TO HER SISTER, MRS. BURDEN

Newcastle, September Something

My Dear Sis: This is to ask a great favour of you, and you must be a pet and grant it. There 's nothing I won't do for you in return, if you will.

I have just been having a most satisfactory chat with Sir L. It began in reference to Dick. Somehow or other that ingenious darling had forced Ellaline Lethbridge to ask Sir Lionel for his (Dick's) hand! I say "forced," because she is not in the least in love with him, indeed, (strange as it may seem to you) detests the ground he walks on; yet she does things that he tells her to do — things she hates like poison. This last *coup* of Dick's convinces me of what I 've often suspected: he knows something about her past which she is deadly afraid he will tell Sir Lionel. It may be connected with that visit to Venice, when the Tyndals saw her; anyhow, whatever the secret may be, it is serious. She is obliged to bribe Dick; but she dislikes him too intensely to marry him ever — even if the way to do so were made easy; so, I reiterate, have no fear on that score.

Sir Lionel fancies himself in love with the girl, but he will get over it, even if he is n't on the way to do so already, pushed roughly onto the right road by her confessed pref-

erence for Dick. For the moment, however, I can see he is rather hard hit, though he would be *mad* if he dreamed I or anyone could read his august feelings. He thinks his hesitation to permit an engagement arises from conscientious scruples, but really it 's because he can't bear to have any other man (or boy) making love to his girl. That 's the brutal truth; and he 's haggling and putting off the evil day as long as he can. He wanted to ask me what my feeling was in the matter; whether *you* would be pleased, and so on. Ellaline might not be rich, he explained, but she would have enough for her own wants as a married woman. He thought her husband, when she had one, ought to wish to do the rest; and though Dick considered his own prospects good, a partnership in a detective agency hardly seemed ideal.

I told him I could n't quite answer for you, as you had always hoped your one boy might fall in love with a rich girl; but that I was sure Dick adored Ellaline. I asked if I should write to you, when Dick did; and he said, half reluctantly, perhaps I had better. Poor wretch, he was afraid I might succeed in persuading you!

I was pathetic on the subject of Dick, and our comradeship, which must be broken by the dear boy's marriage, and as Sir L. was suffering himself, he was in just the right mood to sympathize with me. I snivelled a little; and at last, emboldened by success, I allowed him to gather that there was someone I 'd cared for a long, long time — someone who did n't care for me. At that he was so nice, that I liked him better than I ever thought I could; and since then I feel I really can't and shan't lose him.

No sooner had he given my hand a warm yet disappointing "kind friend" squeeze, at parting, than I routed out Dick in his own room. I promised him that I would induce you to write a nice letter about the proposed engagement to Sir Lionel if he in his turn would persuade Ellaline to put in a good word for *me* with Sir L., to tell him that she believed I cared for him a good deal, and was unhappy.

When I said "persuade" to Dick, I meant use his unknown power to command; for if the girl would say that to her guardian, her words would be the one stone capable of killing two birds. It would prove to him that of which I don't think he is perfectly sure at present: her love for Dick, or, at worst, her complete indifference to himself; and it would pop into his head the idea I want to put there, though I have done all it 's safe to do openly toward inserting it.

I saw when I softly hinted at a hopeless affection which had spoiled years of my life, that he did n't think of himself. Somehow, he must be *made* to think; and now is the right time, for his heart is sore, and needs balm. He would be so sorry for me that, in the state he is in, he could n't be hard. He would argue that, as he was bound to be unhappy anyway, he might as well try to make others happy. I feel that everything would happen exactly as I want it to happen if Ellaline Lethbridge could be depended upon to say the right thing.

Of course, there lies the danger: that she won't. But Dick boasts that she 'll have to do as he tells her. It 's worth risking; but he won't give the word unless he thinks that I 've coaxed you 'round.

That 's the favour I ask. Will you, when you get this, wire to me at once, "Writing according to your request to Sir L."? I can then show your telegram to Dick (you must address it to me at Bamborough Castle, where we are to spend a night, after staying one at Cragside) and he will put pressure to bear on Ellaline Lethbridge.

You can be absolutely certain that no harm will come of this. That Dick and she will never be married; whereas, when I am married to Sir Lionel, I 'll give you a present of five hundred pounds, within the first year, to do with as you like. I 'd even be willing to sign a paper to that effect.

Your anxious, yet hopeful

GWEN.

XXXVI

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Bamborough Castle
September 9th

DEAR: I know you are miserable about me, but don't be it, because I 'm not miserable about myself. Honour bright!

I 've done the hateful deed. It was at Newcastle: and I knew I was in for it, the minute I saw Dick. He 's got his partnership, and thinks he 's got me. But there 's many a slip 'twixt Dick Burden and Audrie Brendon.

I would n't tell Sir Lionel I was in love with the horrid Boy Detective, and I 'm happy — or nearly happy — to say that he refused to give his consent straight out to an engagement. He told Dick the same thing; so there 'll be no leaving us two alone in lovesick corners (can corners be lovesick?), or making announcements, or anything appalling of that sort.

Perhaps it was easier, speaking to Sir Lionel, because he had n't been kind to me since the last evening in Chester — I can't think why, though I can think why I deserved unkindness. The ring was terribly on my mind; but he can't have found out about that, because the man in the shop promised he would n't try to sell it until next day.

I could n't get quite what Ellaline wanted, though I

sold two or three other things — all I could sell; but it came nearly to the right amount; and it went off to her in Scotland, in the form of a post-office order, that same night — assured instead of registered, as the letter was so valuable.

Sir Lionel being somewhat frigid and remote in his manner, appearing to take no more interest in me than if he were a big star and I a bit chipped off a Leonid, I delivered myself of what I had to say without great difficulty. I had a queer, numbed feeling, as though if it did n't matter to him, it did n't to me, until just at the last, when he said something that nearly made me cry. Luckily I was able to swallow the sob. It felt like a large, hot, crisp baked potato; and my heart felt like a larger, cold-boiled beet soaked in vinegar.

It 's all over now, though, and I 'm comparatively callous. Maybe the vinegar has pickled me internally?

Bamborough Castle, where we arrived to-day with our kind and delightful hosts of Cragside, is to be the northernmost end of the tour. On leaving, we turn southward; and would make straight for Warwickshire and Graylees, if, in an evil moment, Mrs. Norton and I had n't for once agreed about a place that we longed to see. It is Haworth, where the Brontës lived, and Sir Lionel said that our wish should be gratified. He planned a day in Yorkshire: Ripon, Fountains Abbey, Haworth, Harrogate (not York, because Emily went there with the late Mr. Norton, and has sad marital memories); and the plan still stands. I have an idea that Sir Lionel is impatient to reach Graylees now, so after the Yorkshire field-day we will push on there; and I shall perhaps hear from

Ellaline as to Honoré's plans. He ought to be in Scotland by that time. I 've written her to wire me at the nearest post-office to Graylees Castle, as I don't like to receive telegrams there. But I see no reason why you should n't send a letter to Graylees — the last letter, I hope, which need ever be addressed to me as "Miss Ellaline Lethbridge." It will seem nice to get into my own name again! Rather like putting on comfortable shoes after tight ones that made blisters. And how divine to fly to you — a distracted chicken, battered by a thunderstorm, scuttling back under its mother's downy wing!

Nevertheless, I 'm not going to cheat you out of seeing England through my eyes, because my pleasure — just a little of it — is damped by Dick. I am resigned and calm, and you must n't think me a martyr. I 've told you I hate whiners, and I won't be one. Why, I ought to be thankful for the chance of such a wonderful trip, and not be cowardly enough to spoil it by a few private worries!

Cumberland is even lovelier than Wales, though I should n't have thought that possible. Sir Lionel went climbing with the nice Welsh guide, whom he invited to Keswick, so he was n't with us much; and Dick being in London still, there were only Mrs. Norton, Mrs. Senter, and I to be conducted by Young Nick. It did seem odd being driven by him, and seeing his back look so inexpressive among the most ravishing scenes. I asked if he did n't think Cumberland glorious, but he said it was not like India. I suppose that was an answer?

We spun off into the mysterious enchantments of Borrodaile in gusts of rain; but the heavenly valley

was the more mystic because of the showers. Huge white clouds walked ahead of us, like ghosts of pre-historic animals; and baby clouds sprawled on the mountain sides, with all their filmy legs in air.

At Lodore the water was "coming down" like a miniature Niagara. Heavy rains had filled the cup of its parent river full, and the waterfall looked as if floods of melted ivory were pouring over ebony boulders. What a lovely, rushing roar! It was like the father of all sound — as if it might have given the first suggestion of sound to a silent, new-born world.

Windermere and Derwent Water we saw, too, and each was more beautiful than the other. Also I was much excited about the Giant's Grave, near Keswick, which has kept its secret since before history began.

All the way to Carlisle the country was very fair to see, scarcely flagging in charm to the end; and Carlisle itself was packed with interest, from its old cathedral to the castle where David I. of Scotland died and Mary Queen of Scots lodged.

Now our thoughts were turned toward the Roman Wall, and I thrilled a little, despite the forbidding stiffness of Sir Lionel's disapproving back as he drove. Because of Kipling's splendid story of the Roman soldier in "Puck of Pook's Hill," I knew that for me the Great Wall (all that 's left of it) would be one of the best things. Parnesius, the young centurion, told Una and Dan that "old men who have followed the Eagles since boyhood say nothing is more wonderful than the first sight of the Wall." And also that there were no real adventures south of it. It was disappointing to think that nowadays,

on our way there, we could n't expect to meet "hunters and trappers for the circuses, prodding along chained bears and muzzled wolves" for the amusement of the soldiers in the far northern camps; or that when we should come to the Wall, we 'd find no helmeted men with glittering shields walking three abreast on the narrowest part, screened from Picts by a little curtain-wall at the top, as high as their necks; no roaring, gambling, cock-fighting, wolf-baiting, horse-racing soldier town on one side, and heather wastes full of hiding, arrow-shooting Picts on the other; yet I heard Sir Lionel say we could still trace the guard-houses and small towers, and see how the great camp of Cilurnum was laid out.

We had left the mountains before we came into Carlisle, but not the hills; and after one of grandiose size, which an old Northumbrian we met called "a fair stiff bank," we were on the Roman road; the long, long, straight road forging uncompromisingly, grimly up and down, ever on, scorning to turn aside for difficulties; the road where the Legions paced with the brave Roman step — "Rome's race, Rome's pace," twenty-four miles in eight hours.

Kipling illuminated the way through Haltwhistle and Chollerford to the Chesters, a private park which is a big out-of-doors museum, for it has in its midst the remains of old Cilurnum. We got out at the gates, and wandered among the ruins that have been reverently excavated; a gray and faded scene, like a kind of skeleton Pompeii with dead bones rattling; entrance gateways; ghost-haunted guard-houses; stone rings which were towers; many short, straight streets whose half-buried pavements once rang under soldiers' heels; the Forum; all

the camp-city plan; a map with outlines roughly sketched in stone on faded grass. We had had our first sight of the Wall of which centurions in Britain bragged when they went back to Rome. Then it was a Living Wall; but it is very wonderful still, where its skeleton lies in state.

We had started so early from Keswick, that it was n't two o'clock when we left the Chesters; and I was surprised when, instead of drawing up before some country inn for lunch, we skimmed through a gate only a mile or two away, and stopped under the shadowy frown of an imposing mediæval stronghold. It was Haughton Castle, whose towers and keep are crowded with stories of the past, and the visit was to be a surprise for us. Sir Lionel knew the owner, who had asked us all to lunch, for the "dragon's" sake; and it looked quite an appropriate resting-place for a dragon of elegant leisure. It was as interesting within as without; and after luncheon they took us over the castle; best of all, down in the deep dungeon where Archie Armstrong, a chief of moss-troopers, was forgotten and starved to death by his captor, Sir Thomas Swinburne, a stout knight of Henry the Eighth's day.

There is a long story about Archie, too long to tell you here; but each castle of Northumberland (the county of castles, not of collieries) has dozens of wonderful old stories, warlike, ghostlike, tragic, and romantic. I have been reading a book about some of them, which I will bring you. It 's more interesting than any novel. And King Arthur legends are scattered broadcast over Northumberland, as in Cornwall. Also the "Scots wha

hae wi' Wallace bled" did much of their bleeding and fighting here. There 's history of "every sort, to please every taste," from Celtic times on; but I 'm not sure that the troublous days of the great feudal barons were n't the most passionately thrilling of all.

If the first sight of the Wall was wonderful to the Roman soldiers, so must have been the first sight of the wide Tyne. I know it was so to me, as we flashed upon it at the first important twist of the straight Roman road, and crossed it on a noble bridge.

Of course, Newcastle has a castle; and it was "new" when William the Conqueror was new to his kingdom. Now that I 've seen this great, rich, gay, busy city, ancient and modern, I realize how stupid I was to associate it with mere coal, as strangers have a way of doing, because of the trite remark about "taking coals to Newcastle." Why, the very names of the streets in the old part chime bell-like with the romance of history! And I like the people of Northumberland — those I have met; the shrewd, kindly townsfolk, and the country folk living in gray villages, who love old, old ways, and emit quaint wit with a strong, rough "burr."

They have the look in their eyes that Northern people have, all the world over; a look that can be hard, yet can be kinder than the soft look of more melting Southern eyes. Sir Lionel is of the South — born in Cornwall; yet his eyes have this Northern glint in them — as if he knew and understood mountains. Just now they are terribly wintry, and when they rest coldly on me I feel as if I were lost in a snowstorm without hat or coat. But no matter!

"There were twelve or fifteen of us who left Cragside"

Now, what shall I say to you of Bamborough Castle, which is the crown of our whole tour?

I wish I were clever enough to make the splendour of it burst upon you, as it did upon me.

Imagine us motoring over from Cragside (a very beautiful and famous modern house, with marvellous gardens and enchanting views) which belongs to these kind, delightful friends of Sir Lionel's who own Bamborough Castle. There was a house-party at Cragside, and there were twelve or fifteen of us who left there in a drove of automobiles.

Down the beautiful winding avenue; then out upon a hump-backed, switchback road, a dozen miles and more, past great Alnwick, on, on, until suddenly a vast, dark shape loomed against the sky; a stone silhouette, not of a giant's profile, but of a whole vast family of giants grouped together, to face the sea.

To *own* a Thing like that must feel like owning Niagara Falls, or the marble range of the Sierra Nevada, or biting off a whole end of England and digesting it. Yet these charming people take their ownership quite calmly; and by filling the huge castle from keep to farthest tower with their beautiful possessions, seem to have tamed the splendid monster, making it legitimately theirs.

I thought Alnwick grand, as we passed, but its position is insignificant compared with Bamborough, which has the wide North Sea for a background. On a craggy platform of black rock like a petrified cushion for a royal crown, it rises above the sea, a few low foothills of golden sand drifting toward it ahead of the tide. The grandeur of the vast pile is almost overwhelming to one who, like me,

has never until now seen any of these mighty fortress-castles of the North; but a great historian says that the site of Bamborough surpasses the sites of all other North-umbrian castles in ancient and abiding historic interest; so even if I had been introduced to dozens, my impression must remain the same. "Round Bamborough, and its founder, Ida (the Flame-Bearer), all Northumbrian history gathers"; and it is "one of the great cradles of national life."

Bamborough village, close by, was once the royal city of Bernicia, and the "Laidly Worm" was there to give it fame, even if there had never been a Grizel Cochrane or Grace Darling; but the history of the hamlet that once was great, and the castle that will always be great, are virtually one. I shall bring you Besant's "Dorothy Foster," and lots of fascinating photographs which our hostess has given me. (I don't think I need leave them for Ellaline, as she would n't care.) But you know the story of the Laidly Worm, because Dad used to tell it to me when I was small. The wicked stepmother who turned her beautiful stepdaughter into the fearsome Worm used to live at the bottom of a deep, deep well that opens in the stone floor of the castle keep; and there, in the rock-depths, a hundred and fifty feet below, she still lurks, in the form of a gigantic toad. I have been allowed to peep down, and I 'm sure I caught the jewelled sparkle of her wicked eye in the gloom. But even if she 'd turned me into a Laidly Worm, I could n't be more repulsive than I probably am at present to Sir Lionel; besides, I could crawl away into a neighbouring cave with modern improvements, and console myself with a good cry — which I

"Bamborough surpasses all Northumbrian castles"

can't do now, for fear of getting a red nose. I should hate that, because Mrs. Senter's nose is so magnolia-white, and the background of a magnificent feudal castle sets off her golden hair and brown eyes so passing well.

There might be volumes of history, as well as romances, written about Bamborough Castle — as Sir Walter Scott, and Harrison Ainsworth, and Sir Walter Besant knew. Why, the thrill of unwritten stories and untold legends is in the air! From the moment I passed through the jaws of outer and inner gateways, I seemed to hear whispers from lips that had laughed or cursed in the days of barbaric grandeur, when Bamborough was the king of all Northumbrian castles. There are queer echoes everywhere, in the vast rooms whose outer walls are twelve feet thick; but more deliciously "creepy" than any other place is the keep, I think — even more thrilling than the dungeons. Yet the castle, as it is now, is far from gloomy, I can tell you. Not only are there banqueting-halls and ball-rooms, and drawing-rooms and vast galleries which royalties might covet, but there are quantities of charming bedrooms, gay and bright enough for débutante princesses. My bedroom, where I am writing, is in a turret; quaintly furnished, with tapestry on the wall which might have suggested to Browning his "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."

It 's very late, but I don't like to go to bed, partly because I can't keep jumping up and down to look out of my window at wild crags and moonlit sea when I 'm asleep; partly because I have such silly, miserable dreams about Sir Lionel hating me, that I wake up snivelling; and to write to you when I 'm a tiny bit *triste* is always

like warming my hands at a rainbow-tinted fire of ship's logs.

To-morrow afternoon we are going back to Newcastle, where we will "lie" one night, as old books say, and then make a very *matinal* start to do our great day in Yorkshire, passing first through Durham, with just a glance at the great cathedral. Once upon a time we would have given more than a glance. But, as I told you, Sir Lionel seems to have lost heart for the "long trail."

I never saw him so interested in Mrs. Senter as he has appeared to be these last two nights at Cragside and here. Certainly she is looking her very, very best; and in her manner with him there is a gentleness and womanliness only just developed. One would fancy that a sympathetic understanding had established itself between them, as it might if she told him some piteous story about herself which roused all his chivalry.

Well, if she has told him any such story, I 'm sure it *is* a "story" in every sense of the word. And I don't know how I should bear it if she cajoled him into believing her an injured innocent who needed the shelter of a (rich and titled) man's arm.

Perhaps it is a little sad wind that cries at my window like a baby begging to come in; perhaps it is just foolishness; but I have a presentiment that something will happen here to make me remember Bamborough Castle forever, not for itself alone.

Afternoon of next day

It *has* happened. Best One, I don't quite know what is going to become of me. There has been the most

awful row. It was with Dick, and Sir Lionel does n't know about it yet, and we are supposed to be going away in a few minutes; but maybe Dick is talking to Sir Lionel now, and if he is, I don't suppose I shall be allowed to proceed in the company of virtuous Emily and (comparatively) innocent Gwendolen. I shall probably be given a third-class ticket back to Paris, and ordered to "git."

It 's rather hard that, having sacrificed so much, large chunks of self-respect among other things, it should all come to nothing in the end. Ellaline will want to kill me, for I have thrown her to the lions. It won't be my fault if they don't eat her up.

Oh, darling, I do feel horribly about it, and really and truly, without exaggeration, I would have died sooner than repay her kindness to me by giving her away like this. An ancestress of yours in the Revolution ran up the steps of the guillotine laughing and kissing her hands to the friends she left in the tumbril, and I could have been almost half as brave if by so doing I might have avoided this dreadful abandoning of Ellaline's interests, trusted to me. But what can you do between two evils? Is n't it a law of nature, or something, to choose the lesser?

Dick went just the one step too far, and pulled the chain too tight. He had begun to think he could make me do anything.

A little while ago, I was alone in the armoury, absorbed in looking at a wonderful engraving of the tragic last Earl of Derwentwater, when suddenly Dick came up behind me. I wanted to go, and made excuses to escape, but he

would n't let me; and rather than have a scene — in case anyone might come — I let him walk me about, and point out strange old weapons on the wall. That was only a blind, however. He had something particular to say, and said it. There was another thing I must do for him: find a way of informing Sir Lionel, prettily and nicely, that Mrs. Senter cared for him, and was very unhappy.

I flew out in an instant, and said that I 'd do no such thing.

"You must," said he.

"I won't," said I. "Nobody can make me."

"Oh, can't they?" said he. "I can, then, and I mean to. If you refuse to do it, I shall believe you 're in love with Sir Lionel yourself."

"I don't care what you believe," I flung at him. "There's no shame in saying I like Sir Lionel too well and respect him too much to have any hand in making him miserable all the rest of his life."

"Do you insinuate that marrying my aunt would make him miserable?" Dick wanted to know.

"I don't insinuate. I assert," said I. And by that time I was in such a temper, and my nerves had so gone to bits that I did n't know, and cared less, what I was saying. I went on and told Dick exactly what I thought of Mrs. Senter, and that for a loyal, true sort of man like Sir Lionel it would be better to die at once than have her for his wife — for that would be death, too, only slow and lingering. Dick was white with fury, but I hardly noticed then, for I was seeing red.

"If you call her deceitful, what are you?" he sputtered.

"I 'm neither here nor there," said I.

"Certainly you won't be here long, or where Pendragon is," said he. "I would n't marry you now, if you 'd have me. You 're nothing more or less than an adventuress."

"And you 're a blackmailer," I mentioned, because I 'd gone back to primitive passions, like Eve's, or a Brittany fishwife's.

"That 's a lie," he answered politely, "because blackmailers only threaten; I 'm going to perform. It 's all up with you."

"I don't care for myself," said I. But, as you know, that was only partly true.

Then for a minute Dick seemed to repent. "No good losing our tempers like this," he said. "Take back your insults to my aunt, who is the best pal I ever had — though that 's not saying much — and speak a good word for her to Sir Lionel, whom she really loves, and I 'll let you off."

"I 'd have my tongue cut out first," I answered.

"Is that your last word?" he persisted.

"Yes," said I.

"Very well, then," said he, "you 'll be sorrier for this than you ever were for anything in your life." And he stamped away, leaving me alone.

I flew up to my room, because I was n't going to run the risk of his bringing Sir Lionel in and telling him everything before me. So here I am, and that 's all; except that Emily has come to my door to say her brother wants to know if I can be ready to start in twenty minutes.

Newcastle, Night

We 're back in our rooms at the County Hotel, and I am dazed with the mystery of what is going on. I *was* ready in twenty minutes; and all the automobiles that brought us yesterday were waiting to take us away again. When I came down, Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Senter were in our car; Sir Lionel, cool but polite, prepared to help me in, standing by. He has great control over his features, but I did n't think, if he had heard Dick's story, and intended to shed me at the nearest railway station (not to make a scandal at Bamborough), he could be looking as unmoved as that.

No Dick was in sight. Naturally, I did n't ask for him, but perhaps my eye moved wildly round, for Mrs. Senter read its question, and answered it in a voice like insufficiently sweetened lemonade:

"Your Dick, dear child, has had another urgent summons to his mother's side, and won't be with us to-day. His last words were that you would understand, so I suppose he explained more to you than to me. But you are privileged."

I could have boxed her ears, *hard*.

Emily went on, in her fussy way, to make things clear to my intellect by adding that our host had kindly sent Mr. Burden to the nearest railway station in his own fastest motor, as it seemed he had just time to catch a train leaving almost immediately.

I did n't know what to make of it all, and don't now. Whether a telegram from the invalid mother did really come in the nick of time to save me, like Abraham's ram that caught in the bushes at the last minute; or whether

this sudden dash to Scotland is a deep-dyed plot; or whether he is n't going, really, but means to stop and spy on me disguised as a chauffeur or a performing bear — or *what*, I can't guess.

All I do know is that, so far, Sir Lionel's manner is unchanged. Perhaps Dick left a note with Mrs. Senter, which she is to put into Sir L.'s hand at an appropriate moment? He may seem altered at dinner, to which I must go down soon; or he may send for me and have it out during the evening. I 'll add a line before we get off to-morrow morning.

September 10*th*. 8.45 *A.M.*

We 're just going. He seems the same as ever. I 'm lost in it! I 'll post this downstairs. Please write at once to Graylees; for if I am sent away before, I 'll ask to have letters forwarded to my own address.

Your
AUDRIE.

XXXVII

MRS. SENTER TO HER NEPHEW, DICK BURDEN, AT GLEN LACHLAN, N. B.

Newcastle
September 10*th*
8 *A.M.*

You might have told me what was up. Is your mother really ill? Am anxious and puzzled. Don't think you play fair. Wire, Midland Hotel, Bradford.

Gwen.

XXXVIII

DICK BURDEN TO HIS AUNT, MRS. SENTER, MIDLAND HOTEL, BRADFORD

Glenlachlan,
September 10*th*
8 *P.M.*

Mother not ill. You will know everything to-morrow or day after.

Dick.

XXXIX

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Midland Hotel, Bradford
September 11th

Beloved One: Situation unchanged. I know now how you felt when you had nervous prostration. However, I 'm not going to have it, so don't worry.

If I had been in a state of mind to enjoy it fully, this would have been a wonderful day. But I don't suppose Damocles enjoyed himself much, even if they brought him delicious things to eat and drink, and rich jewels, and the kind of cigarettes he 'd always longed for, yet never could afford to buy — knowing that any instant it might be the hair's time to break.

I don't believe he could have done justice to beautiful Durham Cathedral and the famous bridge; or splendid Richmond Castle on its height above the Swale; or the exhilarating North Road; or charming Ripon; or even the exquisite, almost heart-breaking beauty of ruined Fountains Abbey, by the little river that sings its dirge in music sweeter than harp or violin. No, he could n't have put his soul into his eyes for them, and I did n't. I was almost sorry that we were to go on and see Harrogate and the Strid and Bolton Abbey, because in my restlessness I did n't feel intelligent enough to appreciate

"The exquisite beauty of ruined Fountains Abbey"

anything. I could only be dully thankful that the sword had n't pierced me yet; but I wanted to be alone, and shut my eyes, and not have to talk, especially to Mrs. Norton.

Dimly I realized that Harrogate seemed a very pretty place, where it might be amusing to stay, and take baths and nice walks, and listen to music; and my bodily eyes saw well enough how lovely was the way through Nidderdale and Ilkley to Pately Bridge, where we had to get out and walk through enchanted woods to the foaming cauldron of the Strid. The water, swollen by rain, raced over its rocks below the crags of the tragic jump, like a white horse running away, mad with unreasoning terror. Nevertheless, my bodily eyes were only glass windows which my spirit had deserted. It left them blank still, at Bolton Abbey, which is poetically beautiful (though not as lovable as Fountains), on, up the great brown hill of Barden Moor, through Skipton, where, in the castle, legend says Fair Rosamond lived; until — Haworth. There — before we came to the steep, straight hill leading up to the bleak and huddled townlet bitten out of the moor, my spirit rushed to the windows. The voices of Charlotte Brontë and her sister Emily called it back, and it obeyed at a word, though all the beauty of wooded hills and fleeting streams had vanished, as if frightened by the cold, relentless winds of the high moorland.

Rain had begun to fall. The sky was leaden, the sharp hill muddy; everything seemed to combine in giving an effect of grimness, as the car forged steadily up, up toward the poor home the Brontës loved.

Is n't it a beautiful miracle, the banishing of black darkness by the clear light of genius? It was that light which had lured us away from all the charms of nature to a region of ugliness, even of squalor. The Brontës had lived there. They had pined for Haworth when away. Emily had written about the "spot 'mid barren hills, where winter howls, and driving rain." They had thought there, worked there, the wondrous sisters; they had illuminated the mean place, and made it a lodestar for the world.

When we reached the top of the hill (which was almost like reaching a ceiling after climbing the side of a hideous brown-painted wall), I forgot my own troubles in thinking of the Brontës' tragedy of poverty, disappointment, and death.

We were in a poor street of a peculiarly depressing village, and could not even see the moor that had given the Brontë girls inspiration, though we knew it must stretch beyond. Even in bright sunshine there could be no beauty in Haworth; but under that leaden sky, in the thick mist of rain, the poor stone houses lining the way, the sordid, unattractive shops were positively repellent. All that was not so dark a gray as to look black was dull brown; and not a single window-pane had a gleam of intelligence for the unwelcome strangers. I could imagine no merriment in Haworth, nor any sound of laughter; yet the Brontës were happy when they were children — at least, they thought they were; but it would be too tragic if children did n't *think* themselves happy.

There was the Black Bull Inn, where wretched Bramwell Brontë used to carouse. Poor, weak, vain-glorious

"The foaming cauldron of the Strid"

fellow! I never pitied him till I saw that gloomy stone box which meant "seeing life" to him. There was the museum where the Brontë relics are kept — but we delayed going in that we might see the old parsonage first, the shrine where the preserved relics had once made "home." Oh, mother, the sadness of it, tucked away among the crowding tombstones, all gray-brown together, among weeds and early falling leaves! Here already it was autumn; and though I could fancy a pale, frosty spring, and a white, ice-bound winter, my imagination could conjure up no richness of summer.

The gravestones crowding the gray old house in the churchyard, pushing it back toward the moor, were thick as an army on parade — a sad, starved army, where dying soldiers lean on each other for support; and the parsonage, shadowed by dripping trees, was plain and uncompromising as a sermon that warns you not to love the world or you will spend eternity in hell. But behind — just beyond the wall — billowed the moor, monotonous yet majestic, the scene that called to Emily and Charlotte Brontë's hearts, always, when they were far away.

My heart contracted as I thought of them there; and when we 'd walked back to the village street, and been admitted to the museum, I was on the point of crying — not for myself, but with the choked grief one might have on opening a box of old letters from a loved, dead friend. It is the most intimate, touching little jumble of pathetic souvenirs you ever saw in a museum; more like treasures guarded by near relations than a collection for public eyes to see; but that makes the poignant charm of it. I could have sobbed on a pink print frock with a

cape, such as Jane Eyre might have worn at Thornfield, and on bits of unfinished needlework, simple lace collars, and water-colour sketches with which Charlotte tried to brighten the walls of her austere home. There was the poor dear's wedding shawl, and a little checked silk dress of which I 'm sure she was innocently proud; a few fantastic drawings of Bramwell's; a letter or two from the sisters; and a picture of the Reverend Carus Wilson, who was supposed to be Mr. Brocklehurst; just the rather handsome, well-fed, self-satisfied man you would expect him to be.

I think, dear, that Haworth has done me good, and helped me to be brave. Again and again I turned, when we 'd left, to look back at the church tower, and try to gather some of the Brontë courage before we slipped away down many a dark hill toward Bradford, as night gathered us in.

I may need all the courage that I have borrowed and cashed in advance, because suspense is worse than the pain of any blow.

We leave here early to-morrow morning for Graylees Castle in Warwickshire — and the tour is at an end.

Your Audrie, who loves and
longs for you.

XL

AUDRIE BRENDON TO HER MOTHER

Graylees Castle
Night of September 12th

Dearest and Wisest: I remember the first letter I wrote you (on July Fourth) about the Ellaline business began with expressions something like this: "Fireworks! Roman Candles ! ! Rockets ! ! ! "

Well, my last letter about the Ellaline business begins with explosions, too. A whole gunpowder plot has exploded: Dick's plot.

We got here in the afternoon; an uneventful run, for Sir Lionel was always the same; cool but kind. I could n't believe Dick had told him anything.

Graylees is a place to be proud of, and you would never know there had been a fire in the castle — but no injury was done to the oldest part. Mrs. Norton says Graylees is called the "miniature Warwick," but it does n't look a miniature anything: it seems enormous. There 's a great hall, with suits of armour scattered about, and weapons of all periods arranged in intricate patterns on the stone wall; and a minstrels' gallery, and quantities of grand old Tudor and Stuart furniture; there 's a haunted picture-gallery where a murdered bride walks each Christmas Eve, beautifully dressed; there 's a suite

of rooms in which kings and queens have occasionally slept since the time when Henry Seventh reigned; there 's a priest's "hidie hole," and secret dungeons under the big dining-hall where people used to revel while their prisoners writhed; and — but I have n't seen nearly all yet.

The room allotted to me looks down from its high tower on to a mossy moat choked with pink and white water lilies; on a stone terrace this side of a sunken garden, a peacock plays sentinel, with his tail spread like a jewelled shield; and against the sky dark, horizontal branches of Lebanon cedars stretch, like arms of black-clad priests pronouncing a blessing. May the blessing rest upon this house forever!

I hardly saw the country through which we came, though it was George Eliot's country; and I half expected something to happen as soon as we arrived; Sir Lionel perhaps turning on me at last, and saying icily: "I know everything, but don't want a scandal. Go quietly, at once."

Nothing of the sort came to pass, however. We had tea in the great hall, brought by an old butler who had known Sir Lionel when he visited the uncle who left Graylees to him. Afterward, Mrs. Norton showed me "my room," where already a maid engaged for "Miss Lethbridge" had unpacked most of my things, the big luggage having arrived before us. My heart gave a jump when I saw the drawers, and big cedar-lined wardrobes full of finery; but settled down again when I remembered that almost everything belonged to Ellaline, and that my legitimate possessions could be packed again in about five minutes.

Before the change of friendship's weather at Chester, I think Sir Lionel would have wanted to take me round his domain, indoors and out, but no such suggestion was made. I was in my room, and there I stayed; but I felt too restless to settle down and write to you. I kept waiting for something, as you do for a clock to strike, when you know it is bound to strike soon.

By and by it was time to dress for dinner. I could n't bear to wear one of the grand Ellaline dresses, so I put on the old black. I did look a frump in it, in such a place as Graylees Castle, where everything ought to be beautiful and rich, but I did my hair as nicely as I could, and from the top of my head to my shoulders I was n't so bad.

I went downstairs at eight o'clock, and Mrs. Senter was already in the great hall, standing in front of the splendid stone fireplace, watching her rings sparkle in the light of the wood fire, and resting one pretty foot on a paw of the left-hand carved stone wolf that supports a ledge of the mantelpiece — just as if it belonged to her and she had tamed it. She glanced up when I appeared, and smiled vaguely, but did n't speak. She seemed thoughtful.

After awhile, Emily came, swishing silkily. Mrs. Senter began to talk to her, praising the place; and then, just before the quarter past — dinner-time — Sir Lionel joined us, looking nice, but tired. Mrs. Senter gave him a sweet smile, and he smiled back, absent-mindedly. He gave her his arm in to dinner, and she did clever things with her eyelashes, which made her seem to blush. She wore a white dress I 'd not seen yet, a simple string of pearls round her neck, and quite a maidenly or bridal look.

I could n't wonder at Sir Lionel if he admired her! At the dinner-table (which was beautiful with flowers, lots of silver, and old crystal — a picture against the dark oak panelling) Mrs. Senter was on his right hand, I on his left, his sister playing hostess. This was as usual; but as it was the first time in his own house, somehow it made Mrs. Senter seem of more importance. He and she talked together a good deal, and she said some witty things, but spent herself mostly in drawing him out. He did n't speak to me, except to deign a question about my room, or ask whether I would have a certain thing to eat. I felt a dreadful lump, and worth about "thirty cents," as Dad used to say.

After dinner, when Emily took us to a charming drawing-room, all white, with an old spinet in one corner, Sir Lionel stopped away for a few minutes; but when he came Mrs. Senter grabbed him immediately. She would n't let him hear, when Emily inquired if I could sing, accompanying myself on the spinet, but began asking him eagerly about the library, which it seems is rather famous.

"You shall see it to-morrow, if you like," said he.

"Oh, may n't I have a peep to-night?" she begged, prettily. "Do take me. Just one peep."

So he took her, of course, and the peep prolonged itself indefinitely. I had a sinking presentiment that my dreadful flare-up with Dick had been in vain, and that after all she would inveigle him into proposing to her this very night. Since I refused to tell him that her damask cheek was being preyed upon by love of him, she would probably intimate as much herself, and bury

her head between her hands, looking incredibly sad and lovable. Sir Lionel would n't be the man to fight such tactics as those! I knew he did n't, would n't, and could n't love her one little bit, but he would be sorry for her, and sacrifice himself rather than she should suffer for his sake, when he might make her happy.

Emily chatted to me pleasantly about the church, and the vicar at Graylees, and family tombs, and such cheerful things, to which I said "Yes" and "No" whenever she stopped; but a cold perspiration was coming out on my forehead. I was just as sure as that I was alive, that Mrs. Senter did n't mean to leave the library until Sir Lionel had made her a present of himself, his books, and his castle. Probably my sub-conscious self or astral body was there, hearing every word they said. Anyhow, I *knew*. And I could do nothing. A thumb-screw or a rack would have been a pleasant relief.

Suddenly we heard the sound of a carriage driving quickly up to the house.

"Who can that be?" wondered Mrs. Norton. "It 's after half-past nine."

"Very likely it 's Mr. Burden," said I; the first moderately intelligent remark I 'd made since we were left together.

She agreed with me that this was probable; but when fifteen, twenty, forty minutes passed by the clock, and Dick did not appear, she changed her mind. It must have been someone to see Sir Lionel, she thought, on business that would n't wait. I was not convinced of this, and longed for her to ring and ask a footman who had come; but I could n't very well suggest it.

The house did sound so silent, that my ears rang, as they do when one listens to a shell!

Ten; ten-fifteen; ten-thirty; a Louis Quatorze clock chimed. Hardly had it got the last two strokes out of its mouth, when Sir Lionel opened the door. He was pale, in that frightening way that tanned skins do turn pale, and he did n't seem to see his sister. He looked straight past her at me, and his eyes shone.

"I want very much to speak to you," he said. His voice shook ever so slightly, as if he were going into a battle where he knew he would be killed, and felt solemn about it, but otherwise was rather pleased than not.

Then I knew my time had come. I almost looked for the steps of the guillotine, but I was suddenly too blind to see them if they had been under my nose.

"Very well," I said, and got up from my chair.

"Oh," exclaimed Emily, "don't go. "If you have anything to say to Ellaline, which you 'd like to say to her alone, let me go. I am getting sleepy, and was just thinking about bed. Perhaps I might say good-night to you both?"

"Good-night, dear," answered Sir Lionel. I had never heard him call her that before.

"Say good-night to Mrs. Senter for me," went on Emily to us both.

"Yes," said Sir Lionel. But I don't think he had heard.

Mrs. Norton swished silkily out. The door shut. I braced myself, and looked up at him. His eyes were on my face, and they were full of light. I supposed it

must be righteous anger; but it was a beautiful look — too good to waste on such a passion, even a righteous form of it.

"You poor child," he said in a low voice, standing quite near me. "You have gone through a great deal."

I started as if he had shot me — that way of beginning was so different from anything I had expected.

"Wh-what do you mean?" I stammered.

"That I always knew you were brave, but that you 're a hundred times braver than I thought you. Dick has come back. He has brought with him a girl and a man from Scotland — bride and groom."

All the strength went out of me. I felt as if my body had turned to liquid and left only my brain burning, and my heart throbbing . But I did n't fall. I fancy I caught the back of a tall chair, and held on for dear life.

"Ellaline," I murmured.

"Yes, Ellaline," he said. "Thank God, you are not Ellaline."

"Thank God?" I echoed in weak wonder.

"I thank God, yes, because it was killing me to believe that you were Ellaline — to believe you false, and frivolous, and a flirt, just because of the blood I thought you had in your veins. And I exaggerated everything you did, till I made a mountain out of each fancied fault. That fellow Burden brought Ellaline here — just married to her Frenchman to-day — because he wanted to ruin you. He told me with pride how he 'd ferretted out the whole secret — traced you to your address in Versailles, learned your real name — told everything, in fact, except that he 'd been blackmailing you, forcing you for

your friend's sake to actions you hated. He did n't tell me that part, naturally, but there was no need, because I guessed ——"

"What — what have you done to him?" The words came limping, because of the look in his eyes, which shot forth a sword.

"Oh, unluckily it 's under my own roof, so I could do no more than bid him clear out if he did n't want to be kicked out!"

"Gone!" I whispered.

"Yes, gone. And as Mrs. Senter 's very loyal to her nephew, she prefers to leave with him, though she has had nothing to do with his plottings — did n't even know, and I asked her to stay. She insists on going to-night when he does. I 'm sorry. But it can't be helped. I cannot think of her now."

"Ellaline ——" I began faintly; but he cut me short, with a kind of generous impatience. "Yes, yes, you shall see her. She wants to see you, now that she understands, but ——"

"Understands?"

"Why, you see, that little beast, Dick Burden — whose mother 's staying near where Ellaline was in Scotland — went there straight from Bamborough, and put the girl up to believe you 'd been playing her false — prejudicing me against her interests, trying to keep for yourself things that ought to be hers; so apparently she worked herself into a hysterical state — must have, or she would n't have believed him against you; and the instant she was married to her Frenchman, who 'd come to claim her, all three dashed off here to 'confront' you,

as that cad Burden explained to me. I could n't understand what they were all driving at just at first, but I saw that the girl was the living image of her mother, consequently the thing did n't need as much explaining in any way as it might otherwise."

"She was horribly afraid you would n't let her marry him," I broke in, getting breath and voice back at last.

"So she said. Oh, when she knew Burden had lied to her about you, she repented her disloyalty, and told me how you hated the whole thing. I don't wonder she thought me a brute, never writing, never seeming to care whether she was alive or dead; I see now I was a brute; but it 's you who 've shown me that, not she. However, she will reap the benefit. I daresay three months ago I should have growled over such a marriage, felt inclined to wash my hands of the girl, perhaps, but now — now I 'm delighted to have her married and — *off* my hands. That sounds callous, but I can't help it. It 's true. The Frenchman seems a gentleman, and fond of her — trust Ellaline de Nesville's daughter to make men fall in love! — and I wish them both joy."

"But — but if he 's poor?" I dared to question.

"Oh, that 'll be all right. I 'm so thankful for the way everything has turned out, I 'd give her half my fortune. That would be asinine, of course; but I shall settle a thousand a year on her for life, and give her a wedding present of a cheque for twenty thousand, I think. Should you say that would be enough to satisfy them?"

"They ought to be distracted with joy," I said (though deep in my heart I knew that Ellaline is never likely to be satisfied with anything done for her. She

always feels it might have been a little more). "But," I went on, "maybe it's selfish to think of myself now — but I can't help it for a moment. I have been so ashamed — so humiliated, I could hardly bear — and yet I know you won't, you can't, see that there's any excuse ——"

"Did n't I tell you that I thought you very brave?" he asked, looking at me more kindly than I deserved.

"Yes. And I was brave." I took credit to myself. "But brave people can be wicked. I have hated myself, knowing how you 'd hate me when ——"

"I don't hate you," he said. "The question is — do you hate me?"

I gasped — because I was so far from hating him; and suddenly I was afraid he might suspect exactly *how* far. "No," said I. "But then, that is different. I never had any reason to hate you."

"Did n't Ellaline warn you I was a regular dragon?"

I could n't help laughing, because that had been our very name for him. "Oh, well, she ——" I began to apologize.

"You need n't be afraid to confess," said he. "In the exuberance of her relief at finding all well, and not only being forgiven, but petted, she told me what a different man I was from the murderous image in her mind; and that she saw now you were right about me. Is it possible you defended me to her?"

"But of course," I said.

"In spite of all the injustice I did you — and showed that I did you?"

"I always felt myself to blame, and yet — yet it

hurt me when I saw you disapproved of me. Since Chester ——"

"It was that ring stuck in my throat," said he.

"You knew?" I stammered, turning red.

"Saw it in a shop window. And now I know why you did it — why you did everything, I think. Heavens, what good it would have done me to kick that little beast Burden all around the park!"

"There would n't have been anything left of him, if you had," I giggled, beginning to feel hysterical. "Oh, I am glad he 's gone, though. I shall be going myself to-morrow, of course, but ——"

"No," he said. "No, that must not be. I — Ellaline wants you."

"Had n't I better see her now?" I asked meekly.

"Not yet. Tell me — did that cad try you too far at Bamborough, and did you defy him?"

I nodded Yes.

"What did he do?"

"He did n't do anything. He wanted me to promise something."

"To marry him at once?" Sir Lionel was looking dangerous.

"No-o. It was n't anything about me. I can't tell you, because it concerns someone else. Please don't ask me."

"I won't. If it concerns someone else, not yourself, I don't care. Yes, I do, though. Did it concern me? Can you answer me that?"

"I can answer so far, if you don't press me further. It did concern you. I would not sacrifice vou to —— but I don't want to go on, please!"

"You shan't. That 's enough. You sacrificed yourself rather than sacrifice me. You ——"

"I 'd sinned enough against you."

"You gave me back my youth."

"I?"

"Don't you know I love you — worship you — adore you?"

Yes, *he said that*, mother. His lips said it, and his dear, dear eyes. I looked up to them, and mine overflowed, and he needed no other answer, for he took me in his arms. I did n't know people could be so happy. I could have died in that moment, only I would much, much rather live.

In a few minutes we told each other heaps of things about the way we felt, and the way we *had* felt, and compared notes; and it was heavenly. He 'd bought back the darling ring in Chester, and now he put it on my finger again; and I 'm sure, dearest, that you won't mind our being engaged?

He says he has adored me ever since the first day, and will to the last, then on into the next world, because there can't be a next world that won't be full of his love for me. And I adore him, ah, *how* I adore him — and you will come here to live with us in this beautiful old castle, where, like the Prince and Princess of the fairy stories, we will be happy ever after.

I have seen Ellaline, and she is well and hugged me a great deal. Her Honoré is really very handsome; but I can't write about them now, though they have been so important in my life; and without them there would have been no life worth speaking of.

Emily and Lionel (I am to call him that now) will take me to you, and everything shall be arranged as you wish.

Dear little, wise mother, I wonder if you ever thought it might end like this? I did n't. But he is the most glorious man who ever happened. Only, he did n't happen. All the rest of the world — not counting you — happened. He just had to be.

Your loving, perfectly happy

AUDRIE.

THE END